MARVEL

DAREDEVIL®

GUARDIAN DEVIL

KEVIN SMITH JOE QUESADA
JIMMY PALMIOTTI

DAREDEVIL

THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!

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DAREDEVIL

THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!

GUARDIAN DEVIL

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DAREDEVIL #½

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INTRODUCTION
by JOE QUESADA

Kevin Smith changed everything.

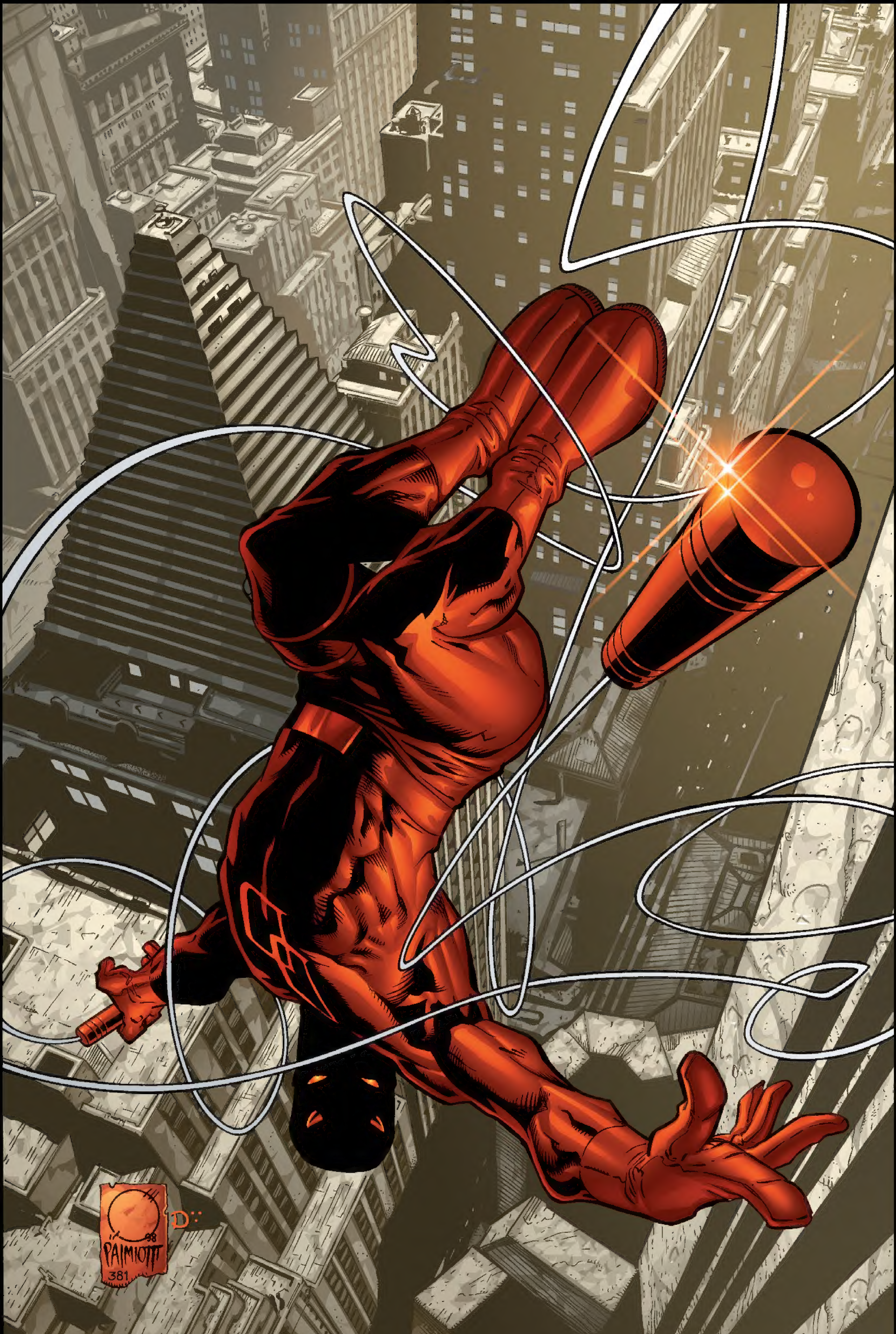
When we were launching the first Marvel Knight books in 1998, Kevin was the coup; he was the linchpin to the whole thing. And I don't mean that as a slight to anyone. I'm talking about impact on us and the industry in general. I think Kevin's coming to comics was literally one of those seminal moments. Someday, if I'm able to look back at comics twenty or thirty years from now, I think the arrival of Kevin Smith is probably the single most important development in this particular era of comics, from the '90s to today.

While there have been some guys from Hollywood who came in and did good work, nobody came in with the cachet and cred a guy like Kevin had. Kevin's jumping into the pool resonated throughout the Hollywood community and made a lot of Hollywood creators and writers who had thought about comics realize, "You know, I could do that, too." So it was all-important — not just from a Marvel Knights standpoint, but from a Marvel and comics industry standpoint — in the overall raising of the quality of comics as we see them today.

He was symbolic of what was to come, and I will love him and sing his praises from now until the cows come home. (And if it wasn't for Kevin, I wouldn't be editor in chief right now.) He took a chance with us, he really did. We were friends, but people often forget what kind of a risk this was for him. Because, here he is, going from the big pond to the small pond — which is infinitely more risky than going from the small pond to the big pond. Kevin had this very good reputation in Hollywood: His movies make money; he's got a lot of cred with his fans. But what if he comes to this small pond — comic books — and fails? What if his stuff is just not good? And that starts to really affect his business in the big pond, because now they're looking at him, going, "You couldn't make it down there? In comic books? Are you kidding me?" So it was a very, very risky venture on his part, but he did it.

And he succeeded.

#1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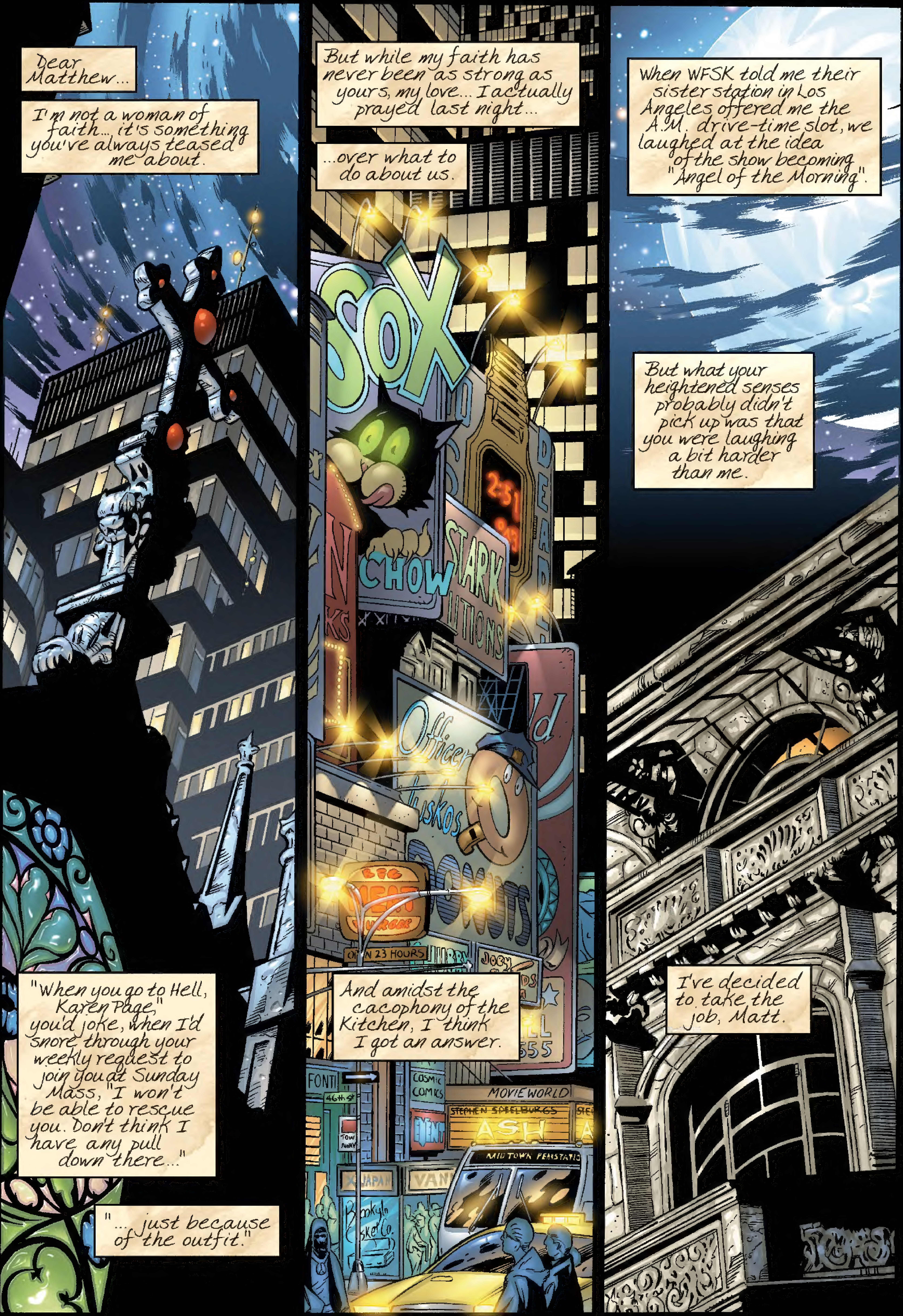

Dear Matthew...
I'm not a woman of faith... it's something you've always teased me about.
"When you go to Hell, Karen Page," you'd joke, when I'd snore through your weekly request to join you at Sunday Mass, "I won't be able to rescue you. Don't think I have any pull down there..."
"...just because of the outfit."
But while my faith has never been as strong as yours, my love... I actually prayed last night...
...over what to do about us.
SOX
CHOW
STARK
Officer Fiskos
DONUTS
OPEN 23 HOURS
46th St
COSMIC COMICS
MOVIE WORLD
ASH
And amidst the cacophony of the Kitchen, I think I got an answer.
When WFSK told me their sister station in Los Angeles offered me the A.M. drive-time slot, we laughed at the idea of the show becoming "Angel of the Morning".
But what your heightened senses probably didn't pick up was that you were laughing a bit harder than me.
I've decided to take the job, Matt.

Things between us lately haven't been the same since the Boroughs case.
Yes, we've had moments of true intimacy; and your tenacious defense that cleared me of murder charges illustrated how -- in both of your guises -- you've always been my hero.
And what a brave face you kept as they drug my name through the mud. You never once expressed shame or judgment...
...verbally.
I know you've always been able to forgive, Matt -- it's one of the aspects of your faith that I've long admired. But forgetting...
... well, that's never been your strongest suit.
And while you never talk about it, it's the occasional silence between us that says it all (or the occasional complete disappearance from our lives, as in the last few months). You are ashamed of that time in our past.
And rightfully so.
Not a day goes by when I don't marvel over how someone I so completely wronged could let me back into their life so blithely.
But, that's just it, Matt...
... there will always be that feeling that you let me back into your life. It will always have been your choice. And as such, that disparity will always gnaw at me.
I'm sure this sounds selfish -- like I want an unconditional love from someone who's seen me at my ultimate worst.
Like I want ten more percent from someone who's already given one hundred and twenty. I must sound irrational.
But who ever said the heart was rational?
I love you, Matthew Murdock -- in more ways that I can express. You will forever be at the center of all things for me -- the fulcrum to my lever.
But this move will give us both time to figure out if we truly are in love...
... or just in love with the idea that we're strong enough to triumph over every adversity life throws our way...
... or the ones my past has created for us.
Be well, my hero. I shall think of you often. And if I ever become a woman of faith...
... I will pray for you... and us.
Love, Karen.

IN NEW YORK CITY, A CHILD IS BORN APPROXIMATELY EVERY EIGHT MINUTES.
THERE ARE 218 DIFFERENT HOSPITALS IN THE FIVE BOROUGHS -- MOST OF WHICH ARE BARELY ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE CITY'S DAILY NEED TO REPOPULATE ITSELF.
THE AVERAGE MATERNITY WARD IS STAFFED BY EIGHT TO TWELVE NURSES WHO SPEND ALL BUT THEIR LUNCH BREAKS IN A CONSTANT STATE OF CARETAKING FOR PATIENTS THEY HAVE NO GENETIC TIES TO.
AT LEAST TWICE A DAY, THEY RUMINATE ALOUD OR TO THEMSELVES ABOUT THE NEED FOR A LIGHTER WORKLOAD.
AT 11:49 LAST NIGHT...
...THEY GET THEIR WISH.
MATERNITY WARD
Oh MY... GOD!
AAAIIIGGHH!
MATERNITY WARD

GWYNETH USED TO SIT OUT OF GYM AS OFTEN AS SHE COULD, CITING HER MONTHLY CYCLE ON A WEEKLY BASIS.
DAILY BUGLE
HOSPITAL TRAGEDY!
PSYCHIC READER
Kitchen DINER
NO STANDING 7AM-8AM
TOWAWAY ZONE
NO PARKING 8AM-9AM
HOUR PARKING 9AM-7PM
QUARTERS ONLY
USA TODAY
HER PHYS ED MARKS ALWAYS BROUGHT DOWN HER GRADE POINT AVERAGE, BUT GWYNETH RATIONALIZED THE TRADE-OFF AS A FAIR ONE.
GETTING THAT SWEATY DURING THIRD PERIOD ATHLETICS MADE THE REMAINING FIVE PERIODS IN THE SCHOOL DAY A TOUGH SIT -- EVEN AFTER A SHOWER.
SHE OFTEN REASONED THAT THE OBLIGATORY LAPS THE PHYS ED INSTRUCTOR DRILLED THE CLASS WITH WOULD NEVER COME IN HANDY BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL.
THIS MORNING -- AS HER LUNGS BURN HOTTER IN HER CHEST THAN ANY NON-SMOKING SIXTEEN YEAR OLD'S LUNGS SHOULD AFTER SPRINTING THROUGH BACK ALLEYS FOR TWENTY MINUTES --
-- GWYNETH'S WISHING SHE'D BEEN A TAD MORE GRADE CONSCIOUS.
California
VIP

IN THE QUIET MOMENTS BETWEEN THE INEVITABLE DETECTION BY THE MEN IN THE CAR, GWYNETH RECALLED THE DAY SHE TOLD HER VERY CATHOLIC PARENTS THAT SHE WAS FOUR MONTHS PREGNANT.
THE SILENT RAGE AND SHAME SHE HEARD IN THEIR VOICES WHEN THEY ADDRESSED HER FROM THAT MOMENT ON ALMOST MADE HER LONG FOR PARENTS WHO BELIEVED IN CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.
SHE CAN STILL FEEL THE DAMP AGAINST HER CHEEK FROM THE TEAR-SOAKED PILLOW SHE'D CRY HERSELF TO SLEEP ON NIGHTLY, AS SHE PRAYED OVER AND OVER, MANTRA-LIKE...
VIP
"...LET THIS BE THE WORST IT GETS."
SAL
BROOKLYN
WHEN SHE AWOKE IN TIME TO SEE THE MEN BEHEADING HER MOTHER OVER HER FATHER'S CORPSE...
...GWYNETH ALLOWED HERSELF ONLY A HALF-SECOND TO MARK THE IRONY.
MAY THE LORD FILL YOU WITH HIS HOLY TRUST...
...OFFERING ABSOLUTION FOR THE TRESPASSES YOU'RE ABOUT TO CONFESS.
TURN NOT A BLIND EYE TO HIS INFINITE MERCY...
...BUT INSTEAD SEE WITH A PURE HEART THE GRACE HIS SACRAMENT OF PENANCE BESTOWS ON YOU.

FORGIVE ME, FATHER -- FOR I HAVE SINNED.
IT'S BEEN... FAR TOO LONG SINCE MY LAST CONFESSION.
SIX MONTHS AGO, MY GIRLFRIEND LEFT ME...
AH -- THE BROKEN HEARTED.
WHY IS IT YOU PEOPLE REMEMBER THE LORD AFTER YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS HAVE FORGOTTEN YOU?
ACTUALLY, FATHER -- THAT'S WHY I'M HERE. YOU SEE -- I'M HAVING A HARD TIME *REMEMBERING* THE LORD.
NOT NOW.

SON, WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH IS FAIRLY COMMON.
THREE BLOCKS AWAY...
... A GIRL -- NO MORE THAN SIXTEEN, JUDGING FROM THAT HEARTBEAT...
... AND A BABY -- MAYBE TWO MONTHS OLD OR SO.
WHEN ONE FEELS THEIR LIFE IS DAMAGED IN SOME WAY THEIR FIRST INSTINCT IS TO REACH OUT TO GOD.
BUT WHAT REALLY HAS MY ATTENTION...
AND BECAUSE YOU'RE PERHAPS NOT AS ARDENT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD WHEN YOU'RE IN A MORE... CORPOREAL... RELATIONSHIP...
... IS THAT LINCOLN RUSHING HER, DOING ABOUT NINETY.
... YOU FEEL THE PANGS OF WHAT WE CALL "CATHOLIC GUILT"...
... A GUILT THAT OFTEN MANIFESTS ITSELF IN A CRISIS OF FAITH.
BUT THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE FOR -- TO REASSURE YOU THAT GOD'S HERE FOR YOU. AND WHILE YOU FEEL YOU MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN HIM, I CAN GUARANTEE YOU HE REMEMBERS YOU.
I HAVE TO SAY, THOUGH -- IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU CHOSE TO DEAL WITH YOUR FEELINGS HERE, RATHER THAN ELECTING THE MORE POPULAR 90'S RITUAL OF "THERAPY".
WHAT THE FAITHFUL OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY TEND TO FORGET IS THAT THE LORD HEALS ALL WHO SEE HIM -- MORESO THAN THE LATEST SELF-HELP TOME OR THE SPIRITUALIST-OF-THE-MONTH POSSIBLY CAN.
ALL IT REQUIRES...

"... IS A LEAP OF FAITH."
Stan Lee presents DAREDEVIL in
GUARDIAN DEVIL
PART ONE:
"...AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM ALL."
KEVIN "You asked for him, you got him" SMITH WRITER
JOE "Smoovie Q" QUESADA PENCILER
JIMMY "Who's your daddy?!" PALMIOTTI INKER
BRIAN HABERLIN STUDIOS DAN "The Baron" KEMP COLORS
RS & COMICRAFT'S LIZ "Danger's my middle name" AGRAPHIOTIS LETTERING
NANCI "Menace to sobriety" DAKESIAN EDITOR
BOB "You couldn't pay us enough to do his job" HARRAS EDITOR IN CHIEF

THE ARROGANCE OF JOHN Q. AVERAGE CRIMINAL THUG NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME.
DON'T THESE PEOPLE READ THE PAPERS OR WATCH THE NEWS...
... OR EVEN TRADE STORIES IN A SEEDY BAR SOMEWHERE? HOW IS IT THEY'RE NEVER APPRISED OF THE FACT...
... THAT THE KITCHEN IS UNDER MY PROTECTION?
KRRKSHH
THE COSTUME IS LINED WITH A METICULOUSLY WOVEN MICRO-MESH STEEL FIBER.
GOD BLESS REED RICHARDS.
THE HYDRANT FALLS UNDER THE BILLION-A-YEAR INSURANCE POLICY THE CITY TOOK OUT FOR METAHUMAN DAMAGES.
I BROKERED THE DEAL LAST MONTH -- FEE LESS.
MORE OF THAT CATHOLIC GUILT THE PADRE WAS TALKING ABOUT.

THE ADRENALINE RUSH SUBSIDES ONCE THE THREAT IS NEUTRALIZED.
AND I'M BACK TO SQUARE ONE -- BATTLING BACK THAT ACHING SENSE OF MOROSE SOLITUDE I WOKE UP WITH.
I THOUGHT A VISIT TO CHURCH MIGHT ALLEVIATE IT. LIKE WHEN I WAS A KID, AND I'D OBSESS OVER...
NO! STAY FOCUSED ON THE TASK AT HAND.
FIRST, CLEAN UP THE MESS.
ONE OUT COLD ONE SUBDUED ENOUGH TO LEAVE IN THE HANDS OF NEW YORK'S FINEST.
GIVES ME A MOMENT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE OBJECT OF THEIR PURSUIT...
...AND FIND OUT WHY SHE WAS IN SUCH HIGH DEMAND.
THAT'S WHEN I REALIZE...
SHE'S GONE.
POLICE
GETTING THE TRUTH OUT OF THE TWO JOKERS IN THE CAR IS GOING TO PROVE FRUITLESS WITHOUT HER TESTIMONY AS TO WHY THEY WERE TRYING TO RUN HER DOWN...
WHICH MEANS I'LL SPEND THE NEXT FEW MINUTES EXPLAINING TO THE POLICE WHY I FELT THE NEED TO PUT MY FIST THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD OF A CAR AND DESTROY CITY PROPERTY.
THANKS, LITTLE GIRL.
YOU'VE JUST MADE MY LIFE INCREMENTALLY MORE DIFFICULT.

THE OFFICES OF SHARPE, NELSON, AND MURDOCK...
MATT MURDOCK
ATTORNEY AT LAW
MY APARTMENT -- WHILE WELL APPOINTED -- ISN'T WHAT I'D CALL LUSH OR HUGE BY ANY MEANS. IT IS, AFTER ALL, A HELL'S KITCHEN APARTMENT.
BUT GIVEN THAT, THERE ARE STILL ROOMS I HAVEN'T BEEN IN FOR MONTHS. THE BATHROOM OFF THE MASTER BEDROOM IS ONE.
WE DESIGNATED THAT AS "HER BATHROOM."
THIS MORNING, A GUY WHO SPENDS HALF HIS LIFE AS A "MAN WITHOUT FEAR" TOOK AN HOUR TO SUMMON THE COURAGE TO USE A BRUSH IN THAT BATHROOM.
THE BRISTLES WERE STILL TANGLED WITH HER HAIR.
THIS IS RIDICULOUS.
I NEED SOMETHING TO TAKE MY MIND OFF HER.
OR SOMEONE.
NATASHA...
HOW HONEST A BOYFRIEND WAS I, AFTER ALL? I KEPT AN OLD FLAME'S NUMBER ON MY SPEED DIAL.
I TELL MYSELF IT'S HER S.H.I.E.L.D. SATELLITE LINK UP CODE...
... THE ONE SHE GAVE ME IN CASE OF TERRORIST THREATS BEYOND MY CAPABILITIES.
I'M A GOOD LIAR. COMES WITH THE JOB.
BOOP
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? I WANT TO TALK TO HER ABOUT A CASE... OR A HYDRA RUMOR... OR A...
ALL RIGHT -- SO I'M NOT SUCH A GOOD LIAR.
HEY MATT -- YOU GOT A MINUTE?
FOGGY.
SAVED BY THE BELL.

ABSOLUTELY, Mr. NELSON. AM I FIRED OR SOMETHING?
SUCH A KIDDER.
MATT, I WANT YOU TO MEET LYDIA McKENZIE.
I'VE BEEN HELPING HER WITH... A CASE.
CALL IT WHAT IT IS, FOGGY -- A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR DIVORCE.
A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MISTER MURDOCK. FOGGY DOES NOTHING BUT RAVE ABOUT YOU.
HER PULSE BARELY PICKS UP.
APPARENTLY, I'M NOT HER TYPE. BUT I'M GETTING THAT FOGGY IS.
NO WONDER HE'S BEHIND ON HIS CASELOAD. IF YOU WANT TO GUARANTEE YOURSELF A DECENT SETTLEMENT, I'D ADVISE YOU TO SWITCH COUNSEL.
HE ALSO WARNED ME THAT YOU'RE QUITE THE SMOOTHIE.
I'VE READ A NUMBER OF YOUR CASES IN THE PAPERS. YOU GET MORE PRESS THAN JOHNNY COCHRANE, IF THAT'S AT ALL POSSIBLE.
THERE... THOSE DUAL HEART SIGNATURES AGAIN.
THE GIRL AND THE BABY FROM THIS MORNING!
CAN'T LOSE THEM. THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO BOOK THOSE THUGS IF I CAN SECURE HER TESTIMONY.
I'D LOVE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THAT HYDE CASE FROM A FEW YEARS BACK. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DEFEND A MONSTER LIKE HIM.
MAYBE YOU, ME AND FOGGY CAN GRAB DINNER SOME TIME AND...
NICE, MURDOCK. HEAD INTO THE NOISIEST PART OF THE OFFICE TO HEAR BETTER.
MISTER MURDOCK -- IT'S A MISTER PARKER FROM THE BUGLE ON THREE.
HE HAS THOSE PHOTOS YOU REQUESTED -- OF YOU AND MISS PAGE FROM THE "GOOD WILL HUNTING" PREMIERE. WOULD YOU LIKE THEM SENT OVER?
DAMN...
LOST THEM AGAIN.

MEANWHILE, ACROSS TOWN...
GENTLEMEN, I MUST CONFESS TO BEING SLIGHTLY ASTONISHED...
AND YOU *KNOW* HOW HARD IT IS TO SURPRISE ME.
IT'S A SMALL BLESSING THAT THE AUTHORITIES WERE UNABLE TO DETAIN YOU. AT LEAST OUR WORK REMAINS UNDETECTED.
HOWEVER...
YOUR FAILURE TO ELIMINATE OUR QUARRY LEAVES THE *ORGANIZATION* AT A TEMPORARY LOSS...
... AND *MYSELF* EXTREMELY EMBITTERED WITH YOU BOTH.
WHILE I'M LIKELY TO GET OVER IT, I'D SUGGEST YOU BOTH TAKE YOUR LEAVE OF MY OFFICE -- BEFORE I ALLOW MISTER GABRIEL HERE TO MAKE EXAMPLES OF YOU FOR OTHERS WHO'D OFFER THE ORGANIZATION LESS THAN THEIR BEST CONCERTED EFFORTS.
YES, SIR.
SORRY, SIR.
DING
"MISTER GABRIEL, THE INEPTITUDE OF THESE DOLTS MAY HAVE INTRODUCED THE VIGILANTE INTO THE FRAY IN SUCH A FASHION THAT MY INVOLVEMENT WILL HAVE TO BECOME MORE THAN PERIPHERAL.
"THAT THE WHELP WAS SEEDED WITHOUT OUR KNOWLEDGE IS ONE THING.
"THAT THE VIGILANTE HAS CROSSED HER PATH ALREADY MEANS WE HAVE TO EXPEDITE OUR EFFORTS AT INTERCESSION.
"I'D ASK ONLY THAT YOU CHOOSE THE HELP A TOUCH MORE WISELY IN THE FUTURE, MISTER GABRIEL.
"THANKS TO THEIR BLUNDER...
"... I'LL HAVE TO APPEAL TO THE VIGILANTE'S HUMANITY."
KTOK

GOD ONLY KNOWS WHY I'M SPENDING THE NIGHT LOOKING FOR THAT GIRL.
GOD ONLY KNOWS WHY I SPEND MY NIGHTS DRESSED LIKE THIS, LEAPING TALL BUILDINGS IN A SINGLE BOUND.
ALL RIGHT -- SO "A SINGLE BOUND" IS OVERSTATING IT A BIT.
IN TRUTH, MURDOCK... IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS... YOU'RE SAYING TO YOURSELF...
"YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THE WRONG GIRL."
KAREN...
I SWEAR, ANGEL -- I TRIED NEVER TO JUDGE YOU... OR YOUR PAST. I HAD NOTHING BUT THE BEST INTENTIONS FOR YOU.
BUT WE KNOW WHAT ROAD THEY PAVE.
AND SO HERE I AM, SOARING THROUGH THE NIGHT SKY, BUSYING MYSELF WITH ANOTHER FOOL CRUSADE...
ALL IN AN EFFORT NOT TO GO HOME TO AN EMPTY HOUSE, FILLED WITH MEMORIES...
... STILL FILLED WITH YOU.
THE ISOTOPE WHICH ROBBED ME OF ONE SENSE, HEIGHTENED THE OTHER FOUR TO THE EXTENT THAT EVEN MONTHS AFTER YOU'VE GONE I STILL SMELL YOU IN THE SHEETS I'VE WASHED A HUNDRED TIMES OVER...
STILL TASTE YOU FROM THAT ONE TIME YOU USED MY TOOTHBRUSH...
FTT
STILL...
I PICK UP THE STINK OF VIOLENT NEED...
CLK
THE ERRATIC PULSE OF SOMEONE WHO'S DISREGARDING ALL THAT WAS INSTILLED IN THEM AS A CHILD...

TK
...FOR A CARNAL RELEASE.
LORD
KRK
...EVERY NIGHT, YOU PUT ON AN IMMORALITY PLAY FOR ME...
YOU SHOW ME THE DISPARITY OF MAN'S MAGNIFICENCE TO HIS ACTIONS. EONS OF EVOLVEMENT, AND WE'RE STILL SEEKING THE DARKENED CORNERS TO SATE OUR LOWEST IMPULSES.
HOW DISAPPOINTING IT MUST BE FOR YOU TO SEE US AT OUR WORST...
SNAP
...IF YOU EVEN EXIST.

THE MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT: AROUND THREE A.M....
THANK YOU...
...LORD.

THE LAW OFFICES OF SHARPE, NELSON, AND MURDOCK...
"FOGGY, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT DIVORCE CASES..."
"I KNOW, I KNOW -- THE ONLY REASON I TOOK IT ON WAS BECAUSE ROSALIND WAS BADGERING ME ABOUT FINANCIAL QUOTAS, MATT."
BUT THIS ONE'S DIFFERENT. HER EX-HUSBAND -- HE DID SOMETHING TO HER.
LET ME GUESS -- HE LEFT HER FOR A GIRL YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE THEIR DAUGHTER?
HE HAD HER STERILIZED, MATT.
WHAT?!
SHE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW UNTIL HER LAST GYNECOLOGICAL EXAM. HE HAD IT DONE WITHOUT HER KNOWLEDGE.
HEARING SOMETHING LIKE THAT MAKES ME WONDER... WHERE I STAND ON GOD?
I SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE HE'S STANDING ON ME.
THIS COMING FROM THE GUY WHO'S PRACTICALLY MISTER LIZ OSBORN.
YES... LIZ. I LIKE LIZ. I *LOVE* LIZ.
BUT SHE'S NO LYDIA.
NO, FOGGY -- DO *NOT* TELL ME YOU'VE GOT A TEXTBOOK CASE OF *"FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE"* SYNDROME...
GOTCHA!
THE TWIN HEARTBEATS ARE SUDDENLY ALMOST DEAFENING.
MATT? WHAT'S... ?
THEY'RE NEAR! I CAN HEAR THEM!

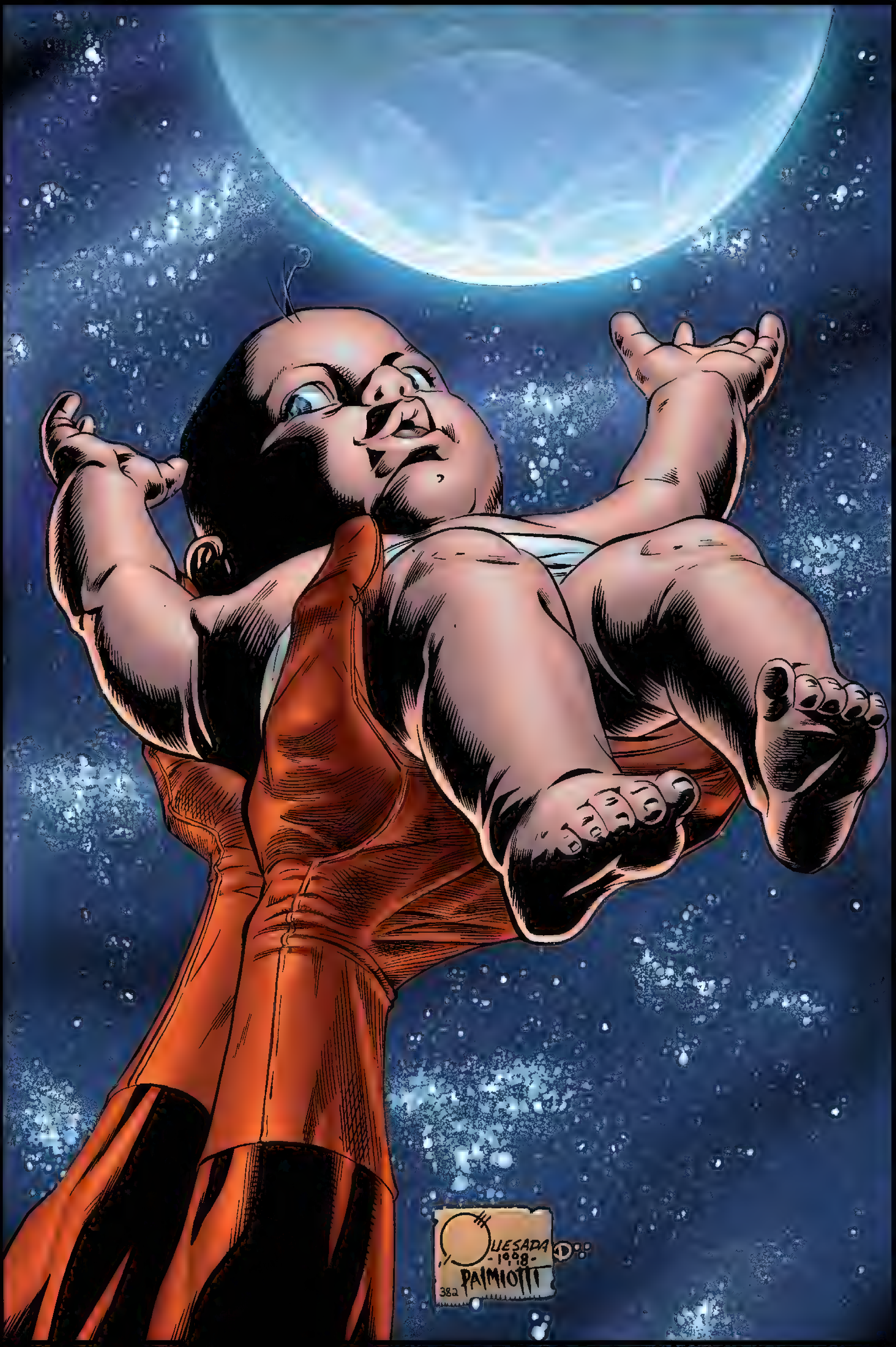
HEAR WHO? IS THIS TIGHTS-TYPE STUFF?
THE BEATS AREN'T FADING. THEY'RE CLOSE...
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO... CHANGE YOUR CLOTHES HERE, ARE YOU?
...SO CLOSE... I CATCH A WHIFF OF THAT UNMISTAKABLE...
... NEW BABY SMELL.
HELLO, MISTER MURDOCK.
GOO!
SOMETIMES I FORGET TO PLAY BLIND IN THE OFFICE. GOTTA WATCH THAT...
...PUN INTENDED.
THE YOUNG LADY BOLTED BY ME BEFORE I HAD A CHANCE TO...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, KIM...
... SHE AND I ARE... OLD FRIENDS. WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO SECURE A CAN OF FORMULA AND A YOO-HOO FOR OUR GUESTS?
Um... SURE. BUT YOU'VE GOT A...
CANCEL IT. THANKS.
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GET BACK TO YOU ON THE McKENZIE CASE, FOG.
I HOPE THERE'S NOTHING YOU'RE NOT TELLING ME HERE.
SHE'S A LITTLE YOUNG FOR YOU, ISN'T SHE, MATTY?
OUT, YOU.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...
... SO YOU MIGHT IMAGINE MY FATHER'S REACTION, MISTER MURDOCK -- LET ALONE EVERYONE ELSE'S.
I MEAN, COMING FROM A FIFTEEN YEAR OLD, I GUESS IT WAS KIND OF HARD FOR EVERYONE TO SWALLOW.
ABOUT THE FATHER?
ABOUT MY VIRGINITY.
NEEDLESS TO SAY, I'M FLABBERGASTED...
A CONDITION THAT'S ONLY EXACERBATED AS SHE PROCEEDS TO EXPLAIN HOW SHE'S NEVER "BEEN WITH" ANYONE AND HOW -- UNTIL THAT MORNING -- SHE HAD NO EXPLANATION AS TO HOW SHE CAME TO BE WITH, THEN HAVE A CHILD.
SHE FOLLOWS THIS WITH A TALE ABOUT THE MURDER OF HER PARENTS AT THE HAND OF THE MEN WHO WERE CHASING HER -- ALL OVER THIS SEEMINGLY "IMMACULATE CONCEPTION."
I'D WRITE IT OFF AS THE OVERACTIVE IMAGINATION OF A KID WHO'S WATCHED FAR TOO MANY EPISODES OF "THE X-FILES."
... EXCEPT HER PULSE HASN'T ALTERED A BEAT IN ALL THE TIME SHE'S BEEN TALKING, AND SHE'S EMITTED NOT A SINGLE PHEROMONE.
SHE'S TELLING THE TRUTH... OR AT LEAST SHE'S CONVINCED HERSELF SHE IS.
yoo-hoo
I ASK HER WHAT SHE'D LIKE ME TO DO.
SHE SAYS...
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW...?
KNEW WHAT?
THE DREAM... THE ANGEL... SHE SAID YOU'D PROTECT MY BABY.
WELL... I CAN OFFER YOU BOTH LEGAL PROTECTION, IF THAT'S WHAT THE "ANGEL" MEANT...
I TELL HER THAT -- WITH HER TESTIMONY -- WE CAN PROSECUTE THE THUGS THAT WERE CHASING HER. I ASSURE HER THAT WE CAN ENTER HER INTO THE WITNESS PROTECTION RELOCATION PROGRAM.
MISTER MURDOCK... THE ANGEL TOLD ME YOU'RE DAREDEVIL.

DO YOU STUDY YOUR BIBLE, MISTER MURDOCK?
NOT SINCE TENTH GRADE CCD.* THOUGH RIGHT ABOUT NOW...
...I WISH I'D STAYED CURRENT.
THE REDEEMEER SWORE HE'D RETURN IN THE FINAL DAYS, TO SAVE THE JUST AND JUDGE THE WICKED.
I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY CHOSE ME, BUT THIS CHILD *IS* THAT REDEEMER. IN THIRTY YEARS TIME, ITS WORK WILL BEGIN.
YOU HAVE TO SHIELD THE CHILD FROM THE EVIL MEN WHO ARE CHASING ME. CHASING US.
*Confraternity of Christian Doctrine or Sunday School -- J&J
YOU'RE A GOOD MAN -- THE ANGEL TOLD ME. I TRUST YOU.
KEEP MY BABY SAFE... AT LEAST, UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.
YOU'RE OUR ONLY HOPE, MISTER MURDOCK...
YOU'RE THIS WORLD'S ONLY HOPE.
HER KISS IS ALMOST... ETHEREAL.
KEEP THE FAITH.
HEY! WAIT A SECOND!
At 5:25 pm...
... the mother of the world vanished from the law offices of Sharpe, Nelson, and Murdock.

At 5:26 p.m, the savior was left in the devil's care.

#2


QUESADA
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382

Stan Lee presents DAREDEVIL in
GUARDIAN DEVIL
PART TWO: "The Unexamined Life"
KEVIN KUNG FU GRIP SMITH WRITER
JOE PUFF DADDY QUESADA PENCILER
JIMMY JIGGY WID IT PALMIOTTI INKER
AVALON STUDIOS
LAURA BEASTIE BABE DEPUY COLORS
RICHARD STARKINGS & COMICRAFT'S
LIZ B TRIBE AGRAPHIOTIS LETTERS
DANCI MIX MASTAH DAKESIAN EDITOR
BOB NOTORIOUS BIG BOSS HARRAS EDITOR IN CHIEF
WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I LOST MY SIGHT -- THANKS LARGELY TO A GOOD DEED.
LATER IN LIFE, I CONTINUED THE TREND BY BECOMING 1) A LAWYER BY DAY, AND 2) A COSTUMED CRIME-FIGHTER BY NIGHT.
FROM NINE TO FIVE, MY NAME'S MATT MURDOCK.
AFTER THAT, I GO BY DAREDEVIL.
THE LADY IS ANOTHER 'COSTUME' I'VE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME -- NATASHA ROMANOV. SHE CALLS HERSELF THE BLACK WIDOW.
WE USED TO DATE.
WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS.
DON'T EVEN TRY TO TELL ME IT'S MINE.

WELL, THERE GOES PLAN 'A'.
HOW ARE YOU, NATASHA?
CURIOUS, MATTHEW.
I'M WONDERING WHY YOU WOULD TRY TO CALL ME, ONLY TO ABORT BEFORE THE CONNECTION WAS MADE.
SOMETHING CAME UP. SOMETHING WHO'S HARDER TO ENTERTAIN THAN A JADED FILM CRITIC.
I'VE NOTICED. TELL ME -- DID YOUR WICKED, WOMANIZING PAST FINALLY CATCH UP WITH YOU?
BABY POWDER
YESTERDAY MORNING, I'M IN CONFESSION...
STILL WITH THE CHURCH. IN ALL THE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER, DIDN'T YOU LEARN *ANYTHING* FROM THE GODLESS SOVIET?
... AND I PICK UP A GIRL AND AN INFANT BEING RUN DOWN. DAREDEVIL PUTS THE KIBOSH ON THE THUGS, BUT THE GIRL AND THE BABY DISAPPEAR.
LAST NIGHT, THE GIRL SHOWS UP IN MY OFFICE, AND DUMPS THE BABY IN MY LAP...
AND SUDDENLY, YOU'RE A DADDY.
I'M NOT THIS KID'S FATHER, I ASSURE YOU.
COULD'VE FOOLED ME...
HE'S GOT YOUR GRIP.

THE GIRL TOLD ME THIS CHILD WAS SOME SORT OF SAVIOR -- A REDEEMER. SHE SAID AN ANGEL TOLD HER TO SEEK ME OUT -- TO PROTECT THE CHILD.
IDEALISTIC YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN, MATTHEW -- BUT GULLIBLE? THAT'S A NEW ATTRIBUTE.
SHE ALSO SAID THE ANGEL TOLD HER I WAS DAREDEVIL.
MAKE THAT *EXTREMELY* GULLIBLE. DIDN'T YOU ONCE TELL ME THAT WILSON FISK KNEW AS WELL?
SNK
LOOK -- HE'S A CLEVER LITTLE THING.
HEY, HEY! CAREFUL THERE!
AREN'T THOSE THINGS LETHAL?
BUT APPARENTLY NOT CHILDPROOF. REMIND ME NEVER TO ASK TONY STARK FOR ENGINEERING TIPS AGAIN.
SO WHAT -- DID YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU TRACK DOWN THE MOTHER?
YOU THINK SHE'S IN CAHOOTS WITH FISK SOMEHOW?
I'M PRETTY SURE THE KINGPIN HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.
I WAS CALLING ABOUT...
SOMETHING ELSE.
I SEE...
AND WHERE *IS* THE DEAR GIRL -- YOUR *'BETTER HALF'*?
KAREN? THAT'S... WELL, THAT'S WHAT I WAS CALLING YOU ABOUT.
YOUR GIRLFRIEND LEFT YOU AND YOU STARTED FEELING... *NOSTALGIC*... ABOUT US?
WE HAVEN'T SEEN ONE ANOTHER IN QUITE SOME TIME -- YOU HAVEN'T ACTUALLY TRIED TO *CONTACT* ME IN I CAN'T REMEMBER HOW LONG.
BUT THE LITTLE WOMAN SENDS YOU PACKING, AND SUDDENLY YOU REMEMBER MY NUMBER AFTER ALL THIS TIME...?
Uh... WELL, THAT IS TO SAY... I DIDN'T MEAN...

YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE, MATTHEW.
YOU'RE SO UNABLE TO FACE THE FACT THAT -- HEROICS ASIDE -- YOU'RE JUST A *MAN...* NO DIFFERENT THAN THE REST.
MY SELF-RESPECT ALMOST DEMANDS THAT I PUMMEL YOU FOR YOUR PRESUMPTUOUS BOORISHNESS...
BUT UNLIKE YOURSELF, I CAN EMBRACE THE BAGGAGE OF MY OWN HUMANITY.
COUCH OR ROOF?
ZZP
AREN'T YOU FORGETTING SOMETHING?
I TRUST YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH ONE OF THESE?
COULD YOU KEEP AN EYE ON IT FOR A BIT? I HAVE TO GO TO MY OFFICE.
I'M GOING TO CHECK OUT THE CITY'S HOSPITALS' BIRTH RECORDS FROM THE LAST FEW MONTHS -- SEE IF I CAN DIG UP ANYTHING ON THE MOTHER.
BUT...
I PROMISE, I WON'T BE LONG.
WOULD YOU MIND CHECKING ITS DIAPER, THOUGH?
I COULDN'T MUSTER UP THE GUTS TO CHANGE IT YET.
THANKS, 'TASHA.
BUT...
GOOD GOD -- I WAS AN *AVENGER!*

THE LAW OFFICES OF SHARPE, NELSON AND MURDOCK...
ZYSK, BRIAN DAVID. MALE. BORN AUGUST SECOND. FATHER: JOSEPH Q. -- AGE THIRTY-TWO; MOTHER: NANCI D. -- AGE TWENTY-NINE.
END OF LISTINGS.
SO MUCH FOR SAINT ANTHONY'S.
THAT'S THE TWO HUNDREDTH AND TWELFTH HOSPITAL'S RECORDS I'VE ACCESSED -- AND I'VE YET TO COME ACROSS A BIRTH RECORD THAT MATCHES THE BABY OR GWYNETH.
IRONICALLY, ALMOST ALL OF THEIR RECENT BIRTHS ALSO ACCOUNT FOR OVER HALF OF THEIR RECENT DEATHS.
SO MUCH CARNAGE, WITH NO POSSIBLE EXPLANATION -- AS IF ONE EXISTS THAT COULD EVER CONSOLE THE GRIEVING. ALL ANYONE CAN DO AT THIS POINT IS BRING THE GUILTY PARTIES TO JUSTICE.
I AND OTHERS LIKE ME SPEND MOST OF OUR LIVES PROTECTING THE INNOCENT -- BUT NONE OF US EVER THOUGHT OF DOING SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS PERIODICALLY CHECKING IN ON ANY GIVEN HOSPITAL'S NEO-NATAL WARD.
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I'M JUST A BANDAGE ON A CANCER.
MISTER MURDOCK?
YES, KIM?
YOUR ELEVEN THIRTY'S HERE.
I HAVE AN ELEVEN THIRTY?
YES, SIR. A NICHOLAS MACABES.
KIM -- THERE'S NOTHING HERE ON MY SCHEDULE ABOUT AN ELEVEN THIRTY.
ACCORDING TO MY SCHEDULE, IT WAS BOOKED WEEKS AGO -- THOUGH I DON'T RECALL PENCILING IT IN MYSELF. SHOULD I RESCHEDULE?
NO. SHOW HIM...
... IN.
GOOD OF YOU TO SEE ME, MISTER MURDOCK.
THE ROOM SEEMS TO HAVE SUDDENLY GOTTEN COLDER...

I'M NICHOLAS MACABES. YOUR ELEVEN THIRTY.
YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME, MISTER MACABES -- I DON'T SEEM TO HAVE ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR CASE ON MY DESK.
YOU WOULDN'T, MISTER MURDOCK -- IT'S A SENSITIVE MATTER THAT'S DEVELOPED IN THE LAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.
I BELIEVE YOU HAVE IN YOUR CARE, A CHILD.
ARE YOU FROM SOCIAL SERVICES?
IN A FASHION -- IT'S SOCIETY I SERVE. SOCIETY AND THE GOOD OF THE WORLD AT LARGE.
I'M AFRAID YOU'VE LOST ME.
MISTER MURDOCK... MATTHEW -- I'M SURE I NEEDN'T INFORM YOU OF THE FORCES AT WORK IN THIS WORLD ON A DAILY BASIS THAT DEFY SENSIBLE EXPLANATION.
IN THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFETIME, YOU'VE SEEN...
...FIGURATIVELY, OF COURSE...
...WONDERS THAT'VE BECOME SO COMMONPLACE, YOUR RATIONAL MIND HAS SINCE STOPPED ANY ATTEMPTS AT PRODUCING VIABLE RESPONSES FOR THE ELEMENTARY INQUIRIES OF 'HOW', 'WHAT', AND 'WHY'. WHETHER IT BE THE UNFATHOMABLE CONUNDRUM OF A 'DEVOURER OF WORLDS'...

...OR THE SIMPLE QUESTION OF HOW A MAN CAN PRODUCE ICE FROM HIS HANDS, BEAMS OF PURE ENERGY FROM HIS EYES, OR ELASTICITY ON A MOLECULAR LEVEL FROM EVERY CELL IN HIS STRUCTURE...
...YOU -- LIKE MOST -- HAVE GIVEN UP ON LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS TO THESE SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES AND ACCEPTED THEM AS ROTE.
I WOULD ASK THAT YOU NOW EXTEND THAT FAITH IN *'WHAT IS'* TO A MATTER MORE... SPIRITUAL IN NATURE.
THAT BEING?
THE END OF TIME. THE APOCALYPSE.
I'LL PLAY ALONG, MISTER MACABES. THIS HAS WHAT TO DO WITH ME?
INTO YOUR SAFEKEEPING HAS BEEN PLACED THE MAIN COG IN WHAT IS TO BE THE MACHINATIONS OF THE END OF THE WORLD. THE INFANT.
YOU DON'T SAY.
MISTER MACABES, YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME -- THERE'S A PILE OF WORK I'VE YET TO GET TO THAT'LL MEAN THE END OF THE WORLD FOR *ME* IF I DON'T GET THROUGH IT TODAY.
I UNDERSTAND YOUR RELUCTANCE -- AS GOOD-HUMORED AS IT IS PHRASED -- TO GRASP WHAT I'M IMPARTING, MATTHEW. HOWEVER, I'M AFRAID I DON'T HAVE TIME TO LEAD THIS HORSE TO WATER, SO TO SPEAK.
SUFFICE TO SAY, MY ORGANIZATION FOUND THE NOTION OF HANDING OVER THE ANTICHRIST TO A MAN WHO ADORNS HIMSELF IN A DEMON'S MANTLE SOMEWHAT TASTELESSLY VULGAR...
...NOT TO MENTION ON-THE-NOSE.
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?! WHO ARE YOU?! HOW DO YOU PEOPLE KNOW...?!
RELEASE ME, COUNSELOR!

THIS IS MY ONLY GOOD SUIT.
YOU'RE BEING USED AS A PAWN, MATTHEW. THE FORCES MYSELF AND MY ORGANIZATION ARE WORKING TO STOP...
... HAVE SINGLED YOU OUT AS AN UNWITTING ACCOMPLICE IN THEIR NEFARIOUS DESIGNS.
YOU'RE A SOMEWHAT RELIGIOUS MAN, SO I ASK THAT YOU REACH BACK TO THE DAYS OF YOUR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND RECALL THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS.
THE ANTICHRIST IS THE HARBINGER OF THE END OF TIME, AND THAT HARBINGER HAS BEEN PLACED IN YOUR KEEPING, UNDER THE GUISE OF THE "INFANT SAVIOR".
IS THAT NOT WHAT YOU WERE TOLD BY THE YOUNG WOMAN IN YOUR OFFICE YESTERDAY?
SOMETHING... SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE CHILD IS THE VERY OPPOSITE OF A SAVIOR. WOULD A "SAVIOR" ALLOW SO MANY INNOCENTS TO DIE IN ITS NAME -- AS SO MANY HAVE OVER THE LAST WEEK IN THIS CITY'S HOSPITALS?
THE CHILD IS A MENACE -- A MAGGOT THAT WILL FESTER INTO THE DEATH OF THIS WORLD, SHOULD IT BE ALLOWED TO AGE.
AND WHILE I CAN APPRECIATE YOUR HESITANCY TO ACCEPT THIS DUE TO ITS OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF INNOCENCE, I WOULD ASK THAT YOU CALL UPON YOUR LACK OF SIGHT TO GET BEYOND WHAT MAY SEEM OBVIOUS...
... AND TAKE HEED OF WHAT I'M, TELLING YOU... THIS FLAME MUST BE DOUSED BEFORE IT GROWS INTO A PYRE THAT WILL ENGULF ALL THAT YOU HOLD DEAR.
HIS HEARTBEAT REMAINS CONSTANT -- SOMEHOW, HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH.
BUT SO WAS GWYNETH... WASN'T SHE?
I'M SUDDENLY VERY BEFUDDLED... AND VERY SCARED.
YOU'RE ASKING ME TO TAKE ITS LIFE?!
I WOULDN'T REQUEST OF YOU SUCH A BURDEN -- THAT IS FOR MY ORGANIZATION TO UNDERTAKE.
WHAT THE ***HELL*** IS THIS ORGANIZATION YOU ***KEEP TALKING ABOUT?!***
ONE WHOSE SOLE PURPOSE IS TO SEE THAT THE HUMAN RACE ENDURES. SHEOL.
HOW COME I'VE NEVER HEARD OF IT?!
BECAUSE SOME CONCEPTS CANNOT BE GRASPED AS EASILY AS OTHERS.

THE UNSEEN WORLD HAS ALWAYS BEEN BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION MATTHEW. IT OFFERS NO ANSWERS, AND RESISTS THE CATEGORIZATION THAT HUMANITY DEMANDS. TO REVEAL OURSELVES... OUR TRUE FORMS... OUR EFFORTS... TO A MIND INCAPABLE OF GRASPING THE SPIRITUAL WOULD BE TO CONDEMN SAID MIND TO MADNESS.
BUT SHEOL HAS BEEN HERE FOR YOU -- LONG BEFORE YOU CRAWLED FROM THE MUCK. WE'VE GUIDED YOUR DEVELOPMENT, AND SET IN MOTION THE MEANS BY WHICH YOU MAY CONTINUE AS A SPECIES.
WE EMBODY YOUR HOPES AND IDEALS, AND WHEN NECESSARY, PROVIDE YOU WTH THE GUARDIANS THAT AID IN KEEPING YOU FROM HARM...
"... WHETHER IT BE PROMPTING RADIOACTIVE INSECTS TO STRIKE...
"... OR SIMPLY HURLING AN ISOTOPE IN THE PROPER DIRECTION.
"... OR GAMMA BOMBS TO EXPLODE IN THE COMPANY OF THOSE WHO CAN RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING HUMANITY...
"THE CHILD IS EVIL -- THAT MUCH I HOPE I'VE IMPARTED TO YOU, IF NOTHING ELSE. AND THE LONGER IT'S IN YOUR CARE, THE MORE YOUR LIFE WILL UNDERGO GRAVE UPHEAVALS."
UPHEAVALS?

EVIL TAINTS ALL IT TOUCHES. THE ONES YOU HOLD DEAREST -- YOU RISK THEM BY HARBORING THE ABOMINATION.
I TELL YOU THIS NOT AS A THREAT, BUT AS A WARNING -- DELIVER THE CHILD UNTO US SO THAT YOU MAY NOT JEOPARDIZE THOSE YOU LOVE.
FORTY-EIGHT HOURS, MATTHEW -- I CAN OFFER YOU THAT MUCH TIME TO COLLECT YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER.
I TRUST YOU'LL MAKE THE WISEST CHOICE -- FOR YOURSELF, FOR US, AND FOR YOUR WORLD.
BUT I SHOULD ADD THAT IF THE FORCES BEHIND THIS DIVINE THAT YOU HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR DUPLICITY, THEY MAY SEEK TO DO YOU HARM.
AND AT THAT POINT...
...NOT EVEN A LEGION OF ANGELS CAN RESCUE YOU FROM HARM.
MATT M
ATTORN

HEAD'S SWIMMING IN A MAELSTROM OF INFORMATION...
SO MUCH SO THAT I ONLY NOW NOTICE THAT HE'S LEFT A CALLING CARD OF SOME SORT.
I THINK I'M...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK.
MATT? HEY -- MATT...
WHO'S THE OLD-TIMER? THE MUSTACHE MAKES HIM LOOK LIKE THAT GUY FROM THE VILLAGE PEOPLE.
EXCEPT... YOU KNOW... OLDER.
HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE -- TRY TO SORT THROUGH THIS...
HEY -- I WANTED TO KNOW IF I COULD BORROW YOUR COMPANY CARD?
I DROPPED MINE IN THE TOILET AT MAYROSE LAST WEEK, AND I WANTED TO TAKE LYDIA OUT TONIGHT, TO TALK ABOUT HER CASE. SO...
THE PLATINUM!
THANKS, MATTY!

FISK.
IT HAS TO BE FISK.
IT'S AN APPROACH I NEVER WOULD'VE EXPECTED FROM HIM, BUT IT'S THE ONLY RATIONAL EXPLANATION I CAN...
THE ONLY... RATIONAL...
"SOME CONCEPTS CANNOT BE GRASPED AS EASILY AS OTHERS," HE SAID.
NO.
THIS IS SOMETHING I CAN'T SLAP A SIMPLE LABEL ON AND FILE CONVENIENTLY UNDER KINGPI...
POP
ALREADY NOT THINKING STRAIGHT.
THE THUG DOESN'T HELP MATTERS MUCH.
MILLER
MAZZ
NOT SUFFICIENTLY COWED BY THE KNEE DISLOCATION THAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HIS ATTEMPT TO MUG ME, HE OFFERS UP SOME SLANDER.
SOMETHING ABOUT MY MOTHER...

SOMETHING UNCALLED FOR...
THAT MAKES ME REALIZE...
SOMETIMES, I'M FAR TOO TOLERANT.
WHAT IS IT WITH YOU PEOPLE?
HAVEN'T I GIVEN YOU ENOUGH OF ME?
YOU WANT TO INVADE EVERY CORNER OF MY LIFE...
LEAVING ME NOTHING SACRED...
SPAKK
WELL, I'VE HAD IT WITH ALL OF YOU!
YOU'RE ALL GOING TO PA...
HEY MISTER...
ARE YOU GONNA KILL THAT GUY?
OH, GOD...
WHAT AM I DOING?
HEY MISTER -- ARE YOU OKAY?
WHAT KIND OF MUGGER WEARS A SUIT?

IT DOESN'T TAKE A PERSON VERY LONG TO SLIP INTO A ROUTINE --
SHLOMO'S MOVING COMPANY
-- TRANSITION TENDS TO BE ALMOST UNNOTICEABLE TO THE PARTY INVOLVED.
WE T 4th B F
OLD ARMY
RODNEY RAT DUMP IT!
GWYNETH HAD COME TO COUNT ON THE CRUSH OF NINE-TO-FIVERS IN THE SUBWAYS TO ACT AS THE CAMOUFLAGE SHE NEEDED TO ELUDE HER PURSUERS.
AND AS MUCH AS IT KILLED HER TO TURN THE CHILD OVER TO A STRANGER -- ALBEIT ONE HAND-PICKED BY THE ANGELS -- AT LEAST NOW IT WAS EVEN EASIER TO EVADE DETECTION...
NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES -- DIRE OR OTHERWISE --
HUMAN NATURE DICTATES WE ADAPT TO REPETITION WITH RELATIVE EASE.
THE REWARD FOR ALL THIS SACRIFICE, SHE REASONED, WAS, THAT SOONER OR LATER, SHE'D BE ABLE TO RETRIEVE HER CHILD FROM ITS TEMPORARY PROTECTOR --GOD WOULD HAVE TO GRANT THAT PAIR THAT MUCH. GOD OWED IT TO THEM.
THEN, PERHAPS, SHE COULD MOVE UPSTATE -- MAKE A NEW LIFE FOR HER AND THE BABY; FALL INTO YET ANOTHER NEW ROUTINE... ONE THAT DIDN'T INVOLVE RUNNING AND HIDING.
NO -- IT DOESN'T TAKE A PERSON VERY LONG TO SLIP INTO A ROUTINE...
...BUT WHAT ONE NEVER REALLY THINKS ABOUT...
...IS HOW THEIR ROUTINE CAN BE OBSERVED BY OTHERS.
WELL PLAYED, MISTER GABRIEL. I OWE YOU FIVE DOLLARS.
YOU'VE GIVEN US QUITE A RUN FOR OUR MONEY, YOUNG HARLOT.
BUT YOU MAY BREATHE EASIER NOW...
THE CHASE IS ENDED.

MERCIFULLY, THE CITY IS QUIET TONIGHT. GIVES ME TIME TO THINK, AND WHAT I'M THINKING RIGHT ABOUT NOW ISN'T PRETTY.
YOU WOULD DO THIS TO ME, WOULDN'T YOU?
I HAVEN'T HAD ENOUGH PAIN IN MY LIFE, AND NOW YOU THROW ME INTO THE MIDDLE OF THIS?
OH, I'M SURE YOU EXIST NOW...
YOU EXIST TO DEVISE A NEVER-ENDING SERIES OF ANGUISHES AND TORMENTS...
...AND THEN YOU HURL THEM MY WAY -- JUST TO SEE HOW I REACT.
WELL, I'M THROUGH PLAYING YOUR GAMES.
LET'S SEE HOW YOU REACT TO THIS ONE...
Officer Jusko
I'M NOT ONE OF THOSE FOUR-BUCK-AN-HOUR BABYSITTERS, RED -- MY PRICE RANGE IS A LITTLE OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE.
HOW WAS IT?
REMINDS ME OF TAKING CARE OF TONY, BACK IN HIS GLASS-TIPPING DAYS.
I HAVE TO CONFESS, THOUGH -- IT'S STIRRED UP ALL SORTS OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS.
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I HEAR MY 'BIOLOGICAL CLOCK' TICKING.
IGNORE IT. IT'S A DARK WORLD -- NO PLACE FOR A CHILD.
AH, BUT THAT'S WHERE WE COME IN, ISN'T IT? NONE OF US DON THESE COSTUMES MERELY TO MAKE A FASHION STATEMENT, DO WE?
WELL, EXCEPT MAYBE DAZZLER BACK IN THE OLD DAYS.
NATASHA -- GIVE ME THE BABY.

IT'S AN OLD QUANDARY -- FIRST YEAR PSYCH STUFF, REALLY. BUT...
IF YOU KNEW WHAT HITLER WOULD EVENTUALLY DO, WOULD YOU HAVE KILLED HIM AS A CHILD?
DEFINITELY NOT. I'D HAVE TAKEN HIM FROM HIS ENVIRONMENT, MAYBE --
TRIED TO RAISE HIM DIFFERENTLY. I BELIEVE IT'S NURTURE -- NOT NATURE.
OF COURSE YOU DO, NATASHA -- YOU HAVE THAT LUXURY.
goo!
TO BE HONEST, THOUGH -- A QUESTION LIKE THAT FROM A MAN HOLDING AN INFANT WORRIES ME.
YOU WANT A LEAP OF FAITH?
TRY THIS ONE.
MATHEW!
NO!
PFFF

CLK CLK
-UNFF!-
ARE YOU INSANE!?
PULLING YOU AND THAT... THING... UP? I MUST BE.
FLPP
TEN SECONDS -- EXPLAIN OR I SNAP IT.
THE KID... IS THE... ANTICHRIST!

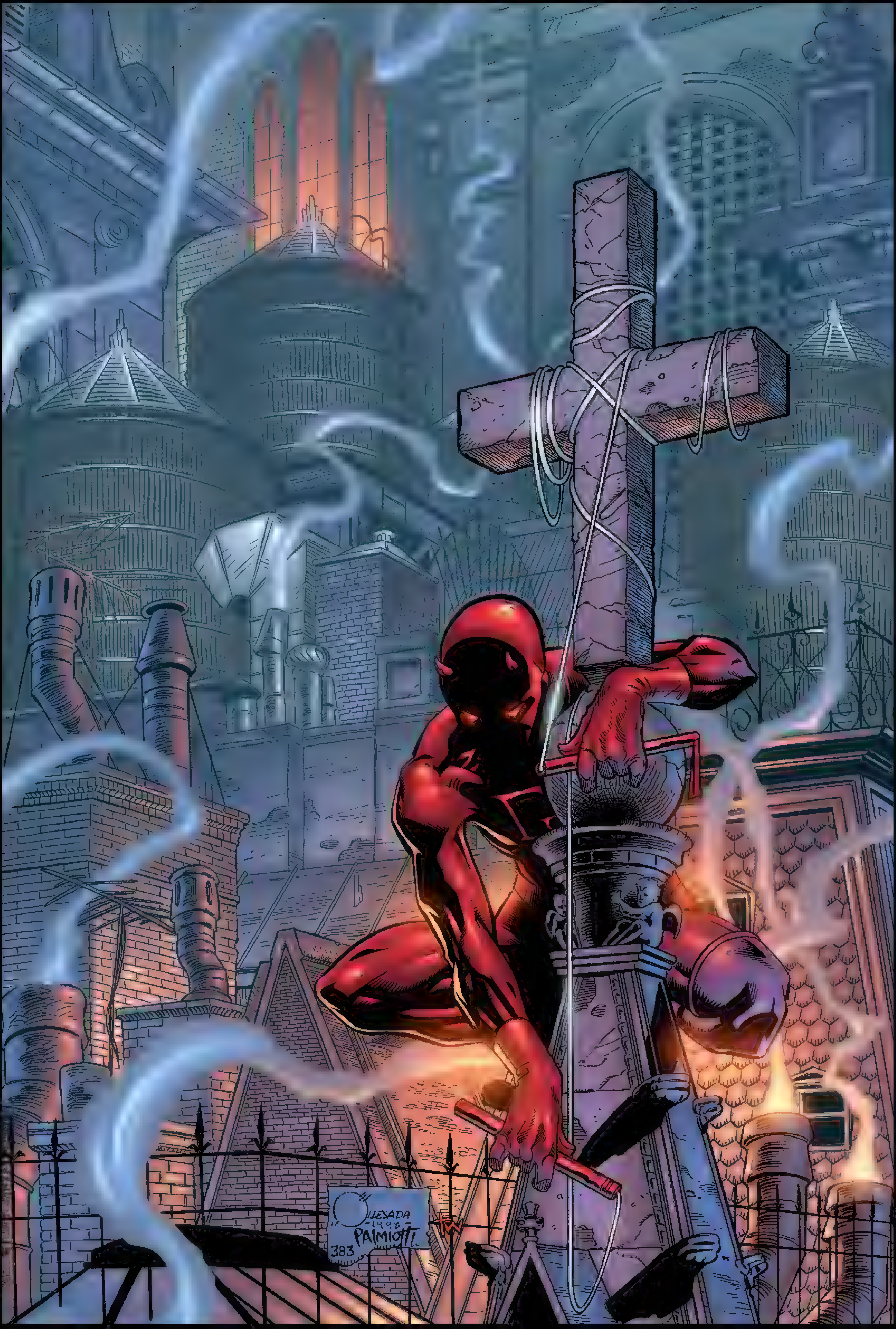
THE ANTI..?
HAHAHA
Oh, MURDOCK -- THE JOB'S REALLY GETTING TO YOU.
HAHA
A MAN CAME TO ME TODAY. HE KNEW THINGS ABOUT THE CHILD. HE SAID IT'S THE HARBINGER OF THE END TIMES.
AND YOU BELIEVED HIM?!
HE KNEW I WAS DAREDEVIL!
SO DID THE GIRL, YOU SAID!
I'M BEING USED, NATASHA! YES, IT'S A BABY -- BUT HE'S HERE TO END THE WORLD!
SHE.
WHAT?
SHE. IT'S A GIRL.
YOU'RE SURE?
EITHER THAT OR HE'S EXTREMELY NOT WELL-ENDOWED. BUT THAT HAS NO BEARING ON WHAT JUST HAPPENED.
MY GOD... WHAT AM I DOING?
HONESTLY, MATTHEW -- I HAVEN'T A CLUE. I'M BEYOND SHOCKED. I DON'T THINK YOU'RE SAFE TO BE AROUND RIGHT NOW -- CERTAINLY NOT AROUND THE CHILD AT LEAST.
I SUGGEST YOU LIE DOWN OR SOMETHING, BUT DO NOT GO OUT THIS EVENING. HELL'S KITCHEN CAN SURVIVE A FEW HOURS WITHOUT ITS 'GUARDIAN DEVIL'...
...A POSITION I'M NOT SURE YOU'RE QUALIFIED TO HOLD AFTER TONIGHT!
GOD HELP ME -- NEITHER AM I.

THE UPTOWN BROWNSTONE OF LYDIA MCKENZIE...
AND YOU OWN THIS WHOLE THING?
DOUGLAS DOES -- IT'S BEEN IN HIS FAMILY FOR YEARS.
BUT I'LL GLADLY TAKE IT OFF HIS HANDS, THOUGH -- ONCE WE HAVE OUR DAY IN COURT, EH, COUNSELOR?
UH... YEAH. SPEAKING OF WHICH...
...I GUESS I'LL CALL YOU IN THE AFTERNOON TOMORROW -- IF I GET NEWS ABOUT THE HEARING.
FRANKLIN -- MAY I BE DIRECT WITH YOU?
SURE, LYDIA. SHOOT.
UM... LYDIA?
I KNOW -- YOU'RE INVOLVED WITH LIZ OSBORN. DON'T WORRY, COUNSELOR...
...I'M THE SOUL OF DISCRETION.

THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES I THOUGHT I WAS LOSING MY MIND.
TO BE QUITE HONEST, THERE ARE TIME I KNOW I'VE LOST MY MIND.
TONIGHT WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES-- I ALMOST LET THAT BABY GO.
I HAVE TO GET HELP -- BEFORE THIS GETS OUT OF CONTROL. I HAVE TO TALK TO SOMEONE.
BUT NOT BEFORE I LOOK INTO THIS "SHEOL" -- SEE IF THERE'S...
OH, NO.
NOT THIS.
NOW NOW.
I PICK UP HER SCENT AS SHE GETS OFF THE ELEVATOR.
I CAN HEAR HER HAIR BRUSHING AGAINST HER JACKET.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE TOYING WITH MY LIFE BEFORE.
Oh, MATT...
THE PROOF NOW STANDS OUTSIDE MY DOOR.
KAREN!
I WAS...
I WAS HOPING YOU WERE HERE!
KAREN -- WHEN DID..?
I'M SO SCARED. WHEN I FOUND OUT, I HAD TO FLY OUT HERE.
I'D THOUGHT ABOUT IT A MILLION TIMES -- HOW COULD I NOT? I MEAN, THE DRUGS, THE MOVIES -- THAT WHOLE PERIOD OF MY LIFE!
BUT I SWEAR -- I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL BEHIND ME! I THOUGHT I MAKE IT OUT ALIVE! I NEVER IMAGINED IT COULD EVER...
PLUMERI'S GYM

GOOD GOD, KAREN -- SLOW...
GOD?! FORGET YOU AND YOUR GOD, AFTER WHAT HE'S DONE TO ME!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, KAREN?! TELL ME!
I'M... I'M SORRY... SO SORRY... I...
MATT... I HAVE AIDS!
WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS.

#3



QUESADA
1998
PALMIOTTI
383

I'VE BEEN BLIND SINCE I WAS A CHILD, AND AS A RESULT, I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN THE WOMAN WHO CRIED HERSELF TO SLEEP IN MY BED LAST NIGHT.
HER NAME IS KAREN PAGE. WE'VE BEEN KNEE-DEEP IN ONE ANOTHER FOR YEARS, BUT SIX MONTHS AGO, SHE LEFT ME.
LAST NIGHT, SHE SHOWED UP AT MY APARTMENT AND TOLD ME SHE'S H.I.V. POSITIVE. MIND YOU, THIS IS AFTER A CREEPY OLD MAN SWORE TO ME THAT -- THANKS TO THIS "EVIL" BABY I'M HARBORING -- MY LIFE WOULD BE CURSED.
IF I WERE THE GLIB TYPE, I'D SAY "IT'S BEEN ONE OF THOSE WEEKS."
BUT NOT EVEN A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR COULD'VE PREPARED ME FOR THE PHONE CALL THAT HAS ME OUT OF BED EARLY THIS MORNING.
I THOUGHT I'D SPEND THE DAY TALKING KAREN DOWN FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LEDGE SHE'S PRECARIOUSLY BALANCED ON. AFTER THE CALL, I WONDERED IF THERE WASN'T ENOUGH ROOM BESIDE HER OUT THERE.
IN LAW SCHOOL, THERE'S A SECOND, LESS ACADEMIC CURRICULUM -- BEYOND THE STANDARD TEXTBOOK STUFF. YOU'RE TAUGHT TO DEVELOP WHAT THEY REFER TO IN THE PROFESSION AS A "JUDGMENTAL VACUUM."
IT'S THE EMOTIONAL VOID A LAWYER HAS TO FIND FOR HIMSELF IN ORDER TO DEFEND A CLIENT YOU FEEL MAY NOT BE COMPLETELY INNOCENT... OR JUST FLAT-OUT GUILTY.
YOU'RE TAUGHT HOW TO GET BEYOND THE SELF-LOATHING THAT CAN UNRAVEL AN AVERAGE PERSON'S SENSE OF MORAL IDENTITY -- ALL SO EVEN THE MOST APPARENTLY GUILTY OF PARTIES CAN HAVE THE BENEFIT OF A FAIR TRIAL. YOU'RE EVEN TAUGHT TO CHERISH ZANTAC, THE ULCER MEDICINE --
-- BECAUSE IF YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE DAY WITH YOUR INTEGRITY INTACT, CHANCES ARE WHATEVER CORROSION YOU SAVE YOUR SOUL WILL MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE LINING OF YOUR STOMACH.
YOU'RE PREPARED FOR AN AWFUL LOT IN LAW SCHOOL...

BUT THEY NEVER PREPARE YOU FOR THIS.
Stan Lee presents DAREDEVIL in
GUARDIAN DEVIL
PART THREE: "DYSTOPIA"
KEVIN MIX MASTAH SMITH WRITER
JOE ICE Q QUESADA PENCILER
JIMMY LIQUID LEAD PALMIOTTI INKER
AVALON STUDIO'S LAURA 64 COLORS IN A BOX 'n' DREW COLORS
RICHARD STARKINGS & COMICRAFT'S LIZ UP ALL NIGHT AGRAPHIOTIS LETTERS
NANCI MAKE A MAN OUTTA YA DAKESIAN MANAGING EDITOR
BOB "IT WAS ALL REALLY HIS IDEA" HARRAS CHIEF

MATT -- REMEMBER TERRENCE FLANAGAN? THE GUY WE REFUSED TO DEFEND IN THAT STABBING CASE?
WELL, I SPENT LAST NIGHT TRYING NOT TO BE '*Mrs. TERRENCE FLANAGAN*'.
FOGGY... WHAT HAPPENED?
I... I'M NOT SURE, MATT.
"I TOOK LYDIA McKENZIE OUT -- TO DISCUSS HER CASE OVER DINNER, AND...
"...WELL...
"...ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER.
"IT ALL HAPPENED SO FAST.
"AND THAT'S WHEN THINGS GOT...
"...WEIRD."

"IT WASN'T HUMAN, MATT. IT CLAWED MY FACE...
"... AND THEN HURLED ITSELF THROUGH THE BEDROOM WINDOW.
"BUT WHEN I LOOKED BELOW, I DIDN'T SEE THAT THING, I SAW LYDIA -- DEAD ON THE GROUND!
"THAT'S WHEN I CALLED THE COPS...
"... WHO FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE MY STORY.
"AND IN A WORLD WHERE THERE'S BEEN FAR STRANGER PHENOMENONA...
"I WAS HAULED OFF FOR MURDER ONE."

AND ALL COULD THINK ABOUT FROM THE MOMENT I CALLED THE POLICE, TO THE MOMENT THEY BROUGHT ME IN HERE WAS...
WHAT DO I SAY TO LIZ?
I'VE LISTENED TO HIS HEARTBEAT. UNDERSTANDABLY, IT'S RACING. THE FEAR AND SHOCK ALONE WOULD INSTIGATE THAT.
BUT HE'S NOT LYING.
FEEL LIKE GOD'S PUNISHING ME, MATT. FOR CHEATING ON LIZ.
GOD HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.
LIZ... LIZ, I'M SO SORRY...
I'LL GET TO WORK ON YOUR RELEASE, FOGGY.

THE LAW OFFICES OF SHARPE, NELSON, AND MURDOCK...
AT WHICH THE MEDIA CIRCUS HAS BEGUN.
KIM, I NEED A PARALEGAL RIGHT NOW!
RIGHT HERE MISTER MURDOCK, I'M TO YOUR LEFT.
I NEED YOU TO GET TO WORK ON POSTING BAIL FOR MISTER NELSON.
I'LL BE IN MY OFFICE, PREPPING A DEFENSE FOR THE ARRAIGNMENT.
NEVER MIND THAT, REGGIE.
GO ASK SECURITY IF WE CAN USE THE DELIVERY ENTRANCE TO GET OUT OF HERE TONIGHT --
-- SEEING AS HOW IT WOULD APPEAR THE PRESS ISN'T GOING AWAY ANYTIME SOON. AND MATTHEW...
... MIGHT I HAVE A WORD WITH YOU IN MY OFFICE?
EVERLAST
IN THE HELL'S KITCHEN APARTMENT OF MATT MURDOCK, A WOMAN TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF HER LIFE.
BUT JUST AS SHE'S ABOUT TO STUMBLE ACROSS AN INNERPEACE...
... KNOCK AT THE DOOR SCATTERS HER THOUGHTS.
MR MURDOCK
IT'S THE STORY OF KAREN PAGE'S LIFE.
MR. MURDOCK: AS PER YOUR REQUEST Peter Parker
MISS PAGE -- I'M AN ACQUAINTANCE OF MISTER MURDOCK'S.
MATT'S NOT HERE RIGHT NOW, MISTER..?
I'M NOT HERE TO SEE MATTHEW, MISS PAGE. I'M HERE TO SEE YOU.
I'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR... UNFORTUNATE SITUATION.

CUTTING HIM LOOSE?!? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!?
WE'RE A LAW FIRM, MATTHEW -- AND A HIGH-PROFILE ONE AT THAT! A SCANDAL LIKE THIS CAN BRING THIS OFFICE DOWN FASTER THAN THE PRESS CAN GOSSIP ABOUT IT!
AND YOU THINK FIRING FOGGY'S GOING TO QUELL THAT?!?
FIRING FRANKLIN BEFORE HIS ARREST WOULD'VE PROTECTED US FROM THE CRISIS WE NOW FIND OURSELVES IN THE MIDDLE OF.
BUT SINCE WE DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS A RAPIST YESTERDAY...
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, LADY?!? HE'S YOUR SON! YOU KNOW HE'S INNOCENT!
ALL I KNOW IS THIS ARREST AND THE CHARGES IT CARRIES WITH IT POTENTIALLY PREJUDICES EVERY JURY IN ALL OUR CLIENTS' CASES AGAINST US...
... JEOPARDIZES THE FUTURE OF THIS FIRM, AND SULLIES MY NAME.
CAN'T AFFORD MYSELF THE LUXURY OF ENTERTAINING ONE OF THOSE OPTIONS, LET ALONE ALL THREE!
SWEET CHRISTMAS, SHARPE -- I THOUGHT YOU WERE COLD IN THE PAST! BUT YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD..!

YOU DON'T THINK I HAVEN'T **AGONIZED** OVER THAT *ALREADY?!*
YOU DON'T THINK I HAVEN'T SPENT THE MORNING IN **TEARS** OVER *WHAT'S HAPPENING* TO MY **SON?!?** YOU DON'T THINK I'D DO **EVERYTHING** IN MY POWER TO CLEAR HIM IF **I COULD?!?**
BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE. I CAN'T RISK LOSING *EVERYTHING* I'VE BUILT OVER IMAGINED APRON STRINGS.
I'VE BEEN A LAWYER LONGER THAN I'VE BEEN A MOTHER TO FRANKLIN NELSON -- IT'S ALL I *KNOW* HOW TO BE AT THIS POINT. AND AS A LAWYER, AS A *PROFESSIONAL...* THIS IS THE ONLY COURSE I CAN SEE TO TAKE.
NICE SPEECH. I HAVE TO GO, ROSALIND -- HAVE TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO PROVE MY PARTNER'S INNOCENCE.
I'M AFRAID YOU CAN'T. I'M LETTING HIM GO, MATT -- NOT YOU. AND I HAVE TO CUT ALL HIS TIES TO THIS FIRM.
YOU'RE SAYING *I* **CAN'T** DEFEND HIM?!?
I'M SAYING THAT NONE OF THIS FIRM'S RESOURCES ARE GOING TO BE AT YOUR DISPOSAL IN THIS CASE.
THEN I ***QUIT!***
SLAM

MINUTES LATER, A FAMILIAR FIGURE LEAPS INTO THE MANHATTAN SKY...
...UNAWARE THAT, THIS TIME...
...HE HAS AN AUDIENCE...
HE'S LEFT THE BUILDING AND IS HEADED YOUR WAY. COMMENCE ATTACK.
SO MUCH TO COVER... FOGGY, KAREN AT HOME. THANK GOD AT LEAST NATASHA HAS THE BABY.
SHE CAN KEEP IT AT THIS POINT, FOR ALL I CARE. AS IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO...
GREAT -- I'M PICKING UP LABORED, MUFFLED BREATHING.
SOME IDIOT'S ATTACKING A WOMAN IN AN ALLEY TWO BLOCKS OVER. IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, NO LESS.

THIS I DON'T NEED RIGHT NOW.
OOOFF!
GIVE ME A REASON TO VENT MY FRUSTRATION, YOU...
FFUP
DID YOU REMEMBER TO BRING THE ICE LIKE I ASKED?
THAT BAD?
YOU'VE SEEN HOW THESE PEOPLE SWOOP DOWN FROM BUILDING-TOPS.
I TAKE IT HE'S SUBDUED.
AT THE EXPENSE OF MY NECK AND BACK, YES. BRING THE VAN AROUND. AND PREP ME AN ICE-PACK.

AND I'M *H.I.V.* POSITIVE BECAUSE... BECAUSE OF THIS BABY?
I WISH IT WERE THAT SIMPLE, MISS PAGE. YOU LED A VERY... SHALL WE SAY...
... *RECKLESS* LIFE, AT ONE POINT.
BUT SOME PEOPLE CAN COME AWAY FROM A CAR WRECK WITHOUT HARM, REGARDLESS OF HOW MANGLED THE VEHICLE IS.
SUCH WAS THE CASE WITH YOU.
YOU ALMOST WALKED AWAY FROM THE DARKER ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE WITHOUT A SCRATCH. BUT THE CHILD I SPEAK OF... IT HAS A WAY OF AFFECTING PEOPLE.
ITS EVIL CORRUPTS THE LIVES OF THOSE IT TOUCHES. IT FINDS A PERSON'S WEAKNESSES -- PAST OR PRESENT --
-- AND DRAWS FROM IT CONSEQUENCES THAT NEVER PREVIOUSLY MANIFESTED THEMSELVES.
NO... NO, THAT'S RIDICULOUS! I WAS A JUNKIE! A JUNKIE WHO...
... WAS WITH ... A LOT OF PEOPLE.
SO YOU'VE SAID. BUT THEN ASK YOURSELF -- WHY ONLY NOW HAS THE INFECTION SURFACED?
IT... IT CAN TAKE A LONG TIME FOR *H.I.V.* TO SHOW UP IN YOUR BLOODSTREAM...
A LONG TIME, YES...
BUT NOT THE YEARS IT'S TAKEN TO SHOW UP IN YOURS.

YOU'VE TESTED YOURSELF HOW OFTEN?
EVERY SIX MONTHS SINCE... SINCE THAT TIME...
AND STOPPED FRETTING ABOUT THE RESULTS YEARS AGO.
BECAUSE YOU FELT YOU WERE SAFE. THE DOCTORS EVEN TOLD YOU AS MUCH -- LONG AGO. AND THIS TEST WAS JUST A FORMALITY AS WELL, WASN'T IT?
FOR AN INSURANCE POLICY AT MY NEW JOB...
AND THE SAME DAY THAT THIS CHILD COMES INTO MISTER MURDOCK'S CARE, YOUR BIOLOGICAL MAKEUP SUDDENLY DECIDES THAT --
-- YEARS BEYOND THE CRITICAL PERIOD IN WHICH ANY POSSIBLE INFECTION WOULD'VE TAKEN ITS TOLL -- ITS IMMUNE SYSTEM HAS BEEN COMPROMISED?
BUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING MAKES NO SENSE...
MANY THINGS IN LIFE DEFY CONVENTIONAL DEFINITION, YOUNG LADY. BUT THAT DOESN'T NEGATE THEIR EXISTENCE.
SOMETHING HAS *HAPPENED* TO YOU, KAREN PAGE -- AND IT WAS NO ACCIDENT. YOU'RE A CASUALTY IN THE WAKE OF EVIL MACHINATIONS YOUR SPECIES IS *EONS* SHY OF EVEN COMPREHENDING.
END THE CHILD, AND YOU END THAT EVIL -- AND REPAIR THE DAMAGE IT'S FORCED UPON THIS WORLD...
... AND YOUR LIFE.
I CAN'T *KILL* A CHILD! I DON'T *CARE* WHAT YOU SAY IT IS -- I *CAN'T END A LIFE* TO *SAVE* MY *OWN!*

PERHAPS NOT. PERHAPS YOU ARE THAT IGNORANTLY VALIANT.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LIVES OF OTHERS? WHAT ABOUT THE LIVES OF *INNOCENT* PEOPLE YOU'LL NEVER MEET... OR THE ONES YOU *ALREADY* KNOW AND LOVE.
EVERLAST
LOVE?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
EVIL SPREADS LIKE A VIRUS. AND WE ALL KNOW HOW VIRUSES SPREAD -- FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER.
FROM CONTACT. FROM CLOSE, *INTIMATE* CONTACT.
Oh, GOD...
Oh, GOD, PLEASE NO...
MATT...

READY FOR THE CLICHE?
"IS THIS HEAVEN?"
I CAN'T PICK UP ANY SOUNDS BEYOND THE RUSTLE OF THE COSTUME, MY THROBBING HEAD, AND MY OWN HEARTBEAT.
WHICH MEANS I'M STILL ALIVE.
LUCKY DEVIL.
I'M IN A MAN-MADE VACUUM. SOMEONE WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO INSURE I CAN'T HEAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF THIS ROOM.
BUT IT IS A ROOM...
WHICH MEANS THERE'S A WAY OUT.
THE ALLEYWAY WAS A SET-UP. BUT WHO? CAN'T BE ANY OF THE USUAL SUSPECTS; WHY GO THROUGH ALL THE TROUBLE WITHOUT KILLING ME?
SOMEONE WANTS ME ALIVE...
AND TO STAY PUT.
IT'S GOING TO BE MY PLEASURE TO DISAPPOINT THEM.

GOOD GOD! THAT SHRIEKING NOISE..! IT'S... DEAFENING..!
CACOPHONOUS BEYOND COMPREHENSION...
THE PAIN...
I CAN BARELY MAKE OUT THE TUMBLERS SHIFTING AS THE DOORKNOB TURNS...
I'M NOT ALONE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT SOUND IS, MISTER MURDOCK? THE ONE THAT'S SO EFFECTIVELY RENDERING YOUR HEIGHTENED SENSES AND EQUILIBRIUM USELESS?
IT'S AN ANGELIC SHRIEK.
IT'S THE CRY OF THE FALLEN -- THE SOUND AN ETHEREAL BEING UTTERS WHEN CAST OUT OF GOD'S PRESENCE.
SICKENING, ISN'T IT? FORTUNATELY, THE FREQUENCY IS SO HIGH, IT DOESN'T AFFECT ME. BUT I'M TOLD IT'S AGONIZING FOR DOGS.
AND FOR YOU, APPARENTLY.
P...P... PLEASE... SSS... SSS... STOP... I... IT...
I'M AFRAID IT'S QUITE NECESSARY TO KEEP YOU AT BAY.
WH... WHO... ARE... YOU..?
WHO I AM IS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE. BUT SINCE YOU ASK, YOU MAY CALL ME BAAL. IT'S AN UNFORTUNATE NAME, I KNOW.
WHAT... D... DO YOU... W... WANT... W... WI...
WHAT DO I WANT WITH YOU? YES -- WELL, IT'S SIMPLE REALLY.
MISTER MURDOCK, I'VE BEEN ON THIS MAN'S EARTH FOR *FIFTY-THREE* YEARS. MY SOLE PURPOSE HAS BEEN TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF SOMEONE SO IMPORTANT, I DARE NOT UTTER THE NAME, AS I'M NOT TRULY WORTHY.

THE SOUND IS UNEARTHLY...
AND OTHERS LIKE ME HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH THE HONOR OF RAISING THE FUTURE OF THIS AND EVERY OTHER WORLD --
-- OF PROTECTING IT FROM ANY HARM THAT MAY COME ITS WAY IN THIS, ITS MOST VULNERABLE TIME.
TRYING TO FOCUS ON THE SOURCE... BUT MY SENSES ARE IN COMPLETE DISARRAY...
AND AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE -- YOU BEING IN THE HERO BUSINESS AND ALL -- THERE ARE FORCES THAT OPPOSE ME AND MINE...
... THOSE WHO WOULD SEEK TO CORRUPT AND COMPROMISE ALL WE ENDEAVOR -- PARTICULARLY WHEN IT COMES TO OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE.
WAIT... I THINK IT'S... YES!... IT'S COMING FROM...
THERE!... A SPEAKER... GOTTA GET A BEAD ON ITS EXACT ANGLE.
FOR ALL I KNOW, IT'S RIGHT BESIDE ME... OR THREE TOWNS AWAY... I'M HELPLESS... UNLESS...
WE KNOW THEY'VE ATTEMPTED TO RECRUIT YOU TO THEIR CAUSE, AND WE DON'T INTEND TO HOLD YOUR MOMENTARY LAPSE OF REASON AGAINST YOU.
YOU'VE BEEN MISINFORMED, MISTER MURDOCK -- IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT YOU CAN'T SEE THAT. YOU ARE, AFTER ALL, BLIND.

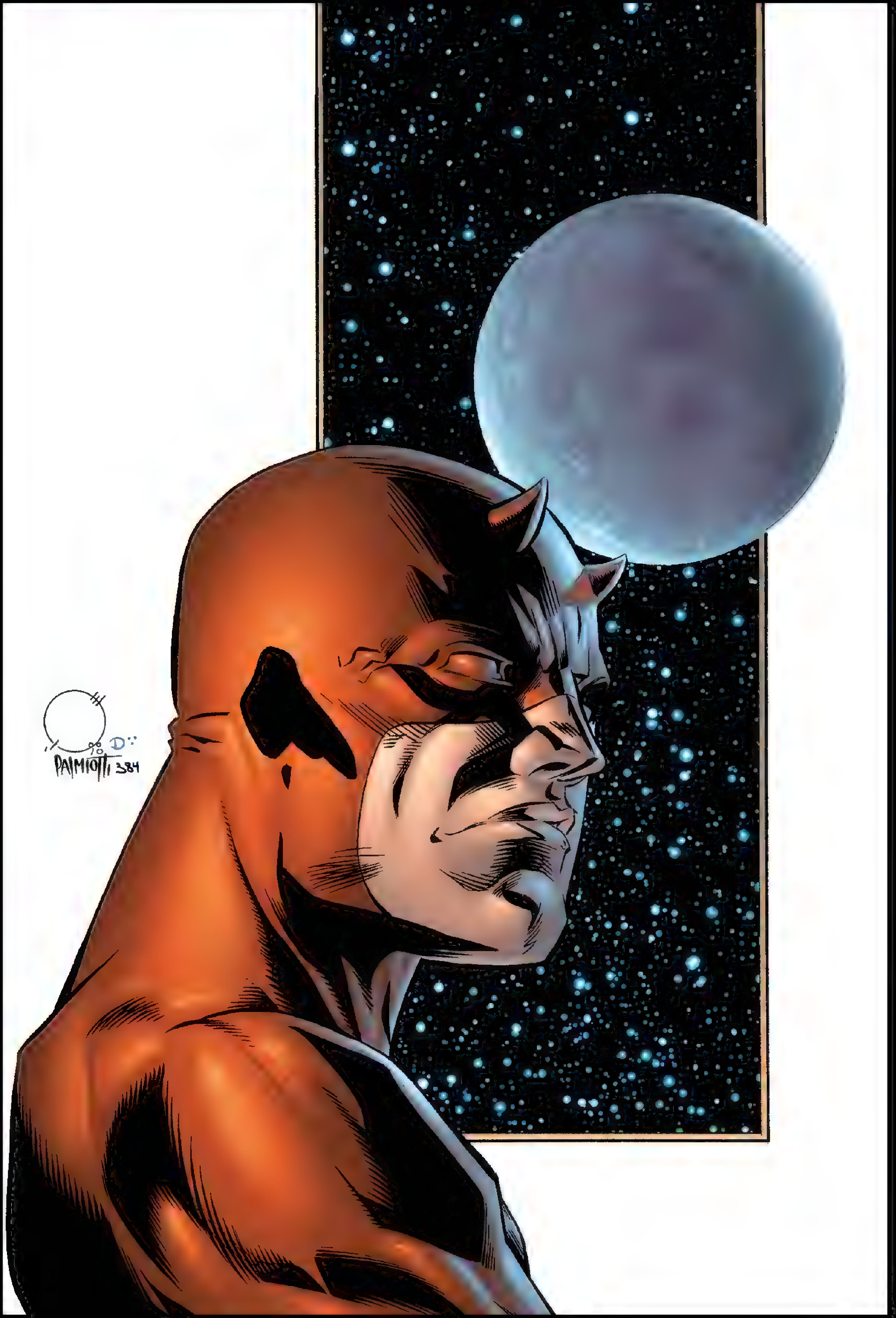
THERE!... A GAP IN THE SOUND!...
IT'S A LOOP... IT HAS A BEGINNING...
IT ALSO HAS AN END.
THERE'S A NANOSECOND PAUSE BEFORE THE LOOP STARTS ANEW...
HAVE TO CONCENTRATE... CLEAR MY HEAD... PHASE OUT CHATTY KATHY HERE...
FIND THE PATTERN... COUNT THE SECONDS TO THE BREAK... WAIT FOR IT...
I APOLOGIZE FOR DETAINING YOU, AND WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO END YOUR DISCOMFORT AND SEND YOU ON YOUR WAY.
BUT BEFORE ANY OF THAT CAN HAPPEN, I NEED TO KNOW ONE THING...
IT'S COMING... HOLD ON, MURDOCK... SHUT HIM OUT...
THE CHILD, MISTER MURDOCK -- THE VERY IMPORTANT CHILD...
IT'S COMING... KEEP HEAD CLEAR... HOLD ON...
WHERE IS THE CHILD?
HOLD ON...

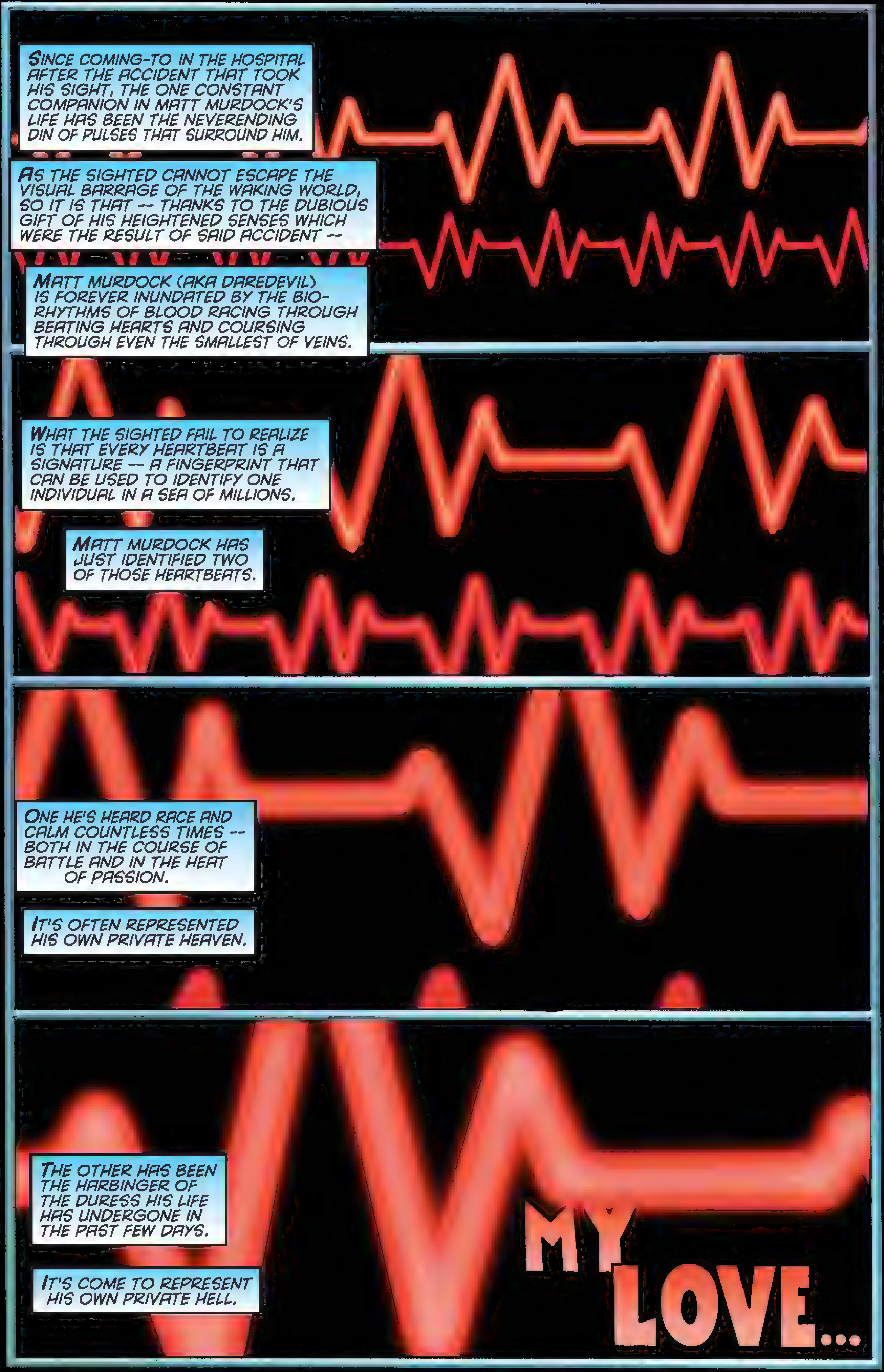
NOW!
THOK
FAPP
Uh-Oh...
TIRED OF THIS...
SEEPING INTO EVERY CORNER OF MY LIFE...
INSANITY...
IT...
... ENDS ...
... HERE!
SMAK
OFF THE BOSS, RED!
THIS IS FOR JUMPING ON MY NECK!
SUBDUE HIM.

SMAK
SPAK
AMATEURS...
BUT STRONG AMATEURS...
DON'T SHOOT!
WE CAN'T **RISK** HARMING HIM!
FWAMMM
THE END IS NIGH
MADE YA LOOK!
JP
DAN
HO! THE
BEWARE THE PANTHER
DUNKEY
ALITHA
BRIAN'S MONKEY'S UNCLE
VINCE
JUSTIN

STILL DISORIENTED...
THE GANG-UP DIDN'T MAKE IT ANY BETTER...
SENSES SCREWED UP...
CAN'T 'SEE'...
WHO YOU KIDDING, MURDOCK? YOU HAVEN'T 'SEEN' IN YEARS...
HONK
HONK
SCREEEEE
NOT SINCE...
...YOU SAVED THAT OLD MAN FROM THAT...
HONK
...WHAT WAS IT AGAIN?...
OH YEAH...
A TRUCK...

#4




SINCE COMING-TO IN THE HOSPITAL AFTER THE ACCIDENT THAT TOOK HIS SIGHT, THE ONE CONSTANT COMPANION IN MATT MURDOCK'S LIFE HAS BEEN THE NEVERENDING DIN OF PULSES THAT SURROUND HIM.
AS THE SIGHTED CANNOT ESCAPE THE VISUAL BARRAGE OF THE WAKING WORLD, SO IT IS THAT -- THANKS TO THE DUBIOUS GIFT OF HIS HEIGHTENED SENSES WHICH WERE THE RESULT OF SAID ACCIDENT --
MATT MURDOCK (AKA DAREDEVIL) IS FOREVER INUNDATED BY THE BIO-RHYTHMS OF BLOOD RACING THROUGH BEATING HEARTS AND COURSING THROUGH EVEN THE SMALLEST OF VEINS.
WHAT THE SIGHTED FAIL TO REALIZE IS THAT EVERY HEARTBEAT IS A SIGNATURE -- A FINGERPRINT THAT CAN BE USED TO IDENTIFY ONE INDIVIDUAL IN A SEA OF MILLIONS.
MATT MURDOCK HAS JUST IDENTIFIED TWO OF THOSE HEARTBEATS.
ONE HE'S HEARD RACE AND CALM COUNTLESS TIMES -- BOTH IN THE COURSE OF BATTLE AND IN THE HEAT OF PASSION.
IT'S OFTEN REPRESENTED HIS OWN PRIVATE HEAVEN.
THE OTHER HAS BEEN THE HARBINGER OF THE DURESS HIS LIFE HAS UNDERGONE IN THE PAST FEW DAYS.
IT'S COME TO REPRESENT HIS OWN PRIVATE HELL.
MY LOVE...

DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER EVER TELL YOU NOT TO PLAY IN TRAFFIC?
STAN LEE presents DAREDEVIL in
GUARDIAN DEVIL
Part FOUR
THE DEVIL'S DISTAFF
KEVIN SMITH TALKIN' DIRTY
JOE QUESADA DRAWING DIRTY PICTURES
JIMMY PALMIOTTI GETTING DIRTY WHILE INKING
AVALON STUDIOS' LAURA'n'DREW COLORING WITH DIRTY BRUSHES
RICHARD STARKINGS and COMICRAFT'S LIZ AGRAPHIOTIS USING DIRTY LETTERS
JOE QUESADA and JIMMY PALMIOTTI JUST PLAIN DIRTY
NANCI DAKESIAN THINKING DIRTY THOUGHTS
BOB HARRAS CLEANING UP THE WHOLE MESS!
YOUR MOTHER... I FORGOT. I APOLOGIZE, MATTHEW.
WH... WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU WERE ALMOST MOWED DOWN BY A VERY LARGE TRUCK, IS WHAT HAPPENED. LUCKY FOR YOU I WAS SWINGING BY AT THE TIME.
THE AIM IS TO HAVE A STREET NAMED *AFTER* YOU, DEAREST -- NOT TO BE MASHED INTO THE ASPHALT OF ONE.
I WAS BEING HELD PRISONER SOMEWHERE... A WHITE ROOM...
A *'WHITE ROOM'* WOULD SEEM APPROPRIATE, CONSIDERING YOUR BEHAVIOR LATELY.
WHO WAS HOLDING YOU CAPTIVE?
THE DEVIL... I THINK...
I DON'T KNOW... I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ANYMORE.
I WENT TO YOUR APARTMENT. YOUR... GIRLFRIEND... WAS THERE -- CRYING IN YOUR BED.
OH GOD, KAREN! DID SHE SEE YOU?
NO -- I SAW HER THROUGH YOUR WINDOW. I THOUGHT IT BEST NOT TO SAY HELLO -- CONSIDERING I'M THE EX-LOVER WITH A BABY STRAPPED TO MY BACK.
SHE DID NOT LOOK... SETTLED, LOUBOV. PERHAPS THERE IS SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH ME?

WHERE WOULD I START? BETWEEN HER AND FOGGY...
FRANKLIN, YES. HE'S ALL OVER THE NEWS... AS WAS YOUR RESIGNATION FROM THE FIRM. THE MEDIA HAS TAKEN IT AS A SIGN OF HIS GUILT.
MY LOVE -- WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR LIFE?
MY LIFE... I'M HAVING THE WORSE FIT OF DEJA VU. HORRIBLE MEMORIES... OF FISK. AND HOW HE DESTROYED MY LIFE ONCE... PIECE BY PIECE.
DO YOU HAVE ENEMIES -- BEYOND THE COSTUMED VARIETY? THOSE WHO MIGHT SEEK TO DESTROY THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK?
THE ONLY ENEMY IT WOULD SEEM THAT IS BEHIND THIS, IS RIDING SHOTGUN ON YOUR BACK.
MATTHEW, PLEASE! I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH A GREAT DEAL --
-- BUT FOCUSING YOUR CONFUSION AND RAGE ON THE CHILD AS YOU HAVE IS BEYOND FORGIVENESS!
SHE'S RIGHT.
OR IS SHE?
MY JUDGMENT -- IT'S BEEN CLOUDED BEFORE. BY LOVE. OR LUST. THE TYPHOID MARY AFFAIR LEAPS TO MIND. KAREN'S BETRAYAL TOO.

MATTHEW? MATTHEW, ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?
THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN MY DOWNFALL. IT'S THE CURSE OF THE MURDOCK MEN -- WE HANG OUR HEARTS ON THE WRONG WOMEN. OFTEN WITH POOR RESULTS.
ALWAYS WITH POOR RESULTS.
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN, NATASHA? NOTHING... UNFORTUNATE... GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? NO -- NOTHING'S WRONG WITH ME. MATT, YOU'RE HURT, LET ME GET YOU TO...
AND NATASHA -- WHAT MAKES HER ANY DIFFERENT THAN THE REST? SHE'S NEVER PROVEN VERY FAITHFUL. HOW MANY TIMES HAS SHE THROWN HERSELF AT TONY STARK? "LIBERAL", SOME OF THE AVENGERS HAVE CALLED HER.
I'D BET THEY'VE CALLED HER WORSE BEHIND HER BACK.
TO WHERE, NATASHA? SOMEWHERE I CAN GET HELP, PERHAPS?
YES -- YES, WE SHOULD GET YOU SOME HELP. YOU'RE NOT WELL...
NO -- NO, I'M NOT. HAVEN'T BEEN... NOT FOR A FEW DAYS, NOW.
WHY AM I TRUSTING HER IN THE FIRST PLACE? THE CHILD'S BEEN IN HER CARE FOR THE LAST DAY, AND NOTHING BAD'S BEFALLEN HER. PERHAPS SHE'S BEEN LUCKY...
OR IN ON IT.
I THINK YOU SHOULD STAY BACK, MATTHEW. YOU'RE MAKING ME NERVOUS, AND YOU SHOULD STAY AWAY FROM US.
THERE! IN DEFENSE OF HER TWISTED PARCEL. SHE'S READY TO ATTACK ME TO PROTECT IT -- TO PROTECT THE EVIL SHE CARRIES.

SHOULD'VE NEVER TRUSTED HER. SHE'S A SPY -- A ONE-TIME COMMUNIST, SENT TO THIS COUNTRY YEARS BACK BY A GODLESS GOVERNMENT TO INFILTRATE AND REPORT ON OUR NATION'S SECRETS.
SHE TURNED ON MOTHER RUSSIA, DIDN'T SHE? AND DON'T OLD HABITS DIE HARD? WHO'S TO SAY SHE'S NOT BETRAYING MANKIND?
HOW MUCH DID THEY GET YOU FOR, NATASHA? WHAT PRICE DID THEY OFFER FOR YOUR SOUL?
DON'T MAKE ME DO THIS, MATT... PLEASE...
YOU CERTAINLY HAD ME FOOLED. I DIDN'T EVEN THINK TO QUESTION THE TIMELINESS WITH WHICH YOU SHOWED UP AT MY APARTMENT...
YOU CALLED *ME!* MATTHEW, I LOVE YOU!
BUT BETRAYAL IS A WOMAN, ISN'T IT? THEY BIRTHED IT IN THE GARDEN AND HAVE PASSED IT DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION EVER SINCE -- TEACHING THEIR SUCCESSORS THE ART OF THE UNTRUTH... THE BEAUTY OF DECEPTION. SATAN'S THEIR FATHER...
GIVE ME THE KID, NATASHA.
MATT, DON'T MAKE ME DO THIS... PLEASE...
...AND THE BLACK WIDOW IS DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL!
YOU'VE ALREADY DONE IT, WOMAN...
BUT I'M HERE TO *UNDO* IT!

I LOOK BACK ON MY LIFE AND IT'S LITTERED WITH THE LIES WOMEN HAVE TOLD ME. LIES THAT HAVE BLACKENED MY SOUL.
WELL, IT'S TIME TO DELIVER A LESSON IN TRUTH.
AND TRUTH...
WELL, TRUTH IS PAIN.
AAUGGHH!
SO MUCH, SO WRONG, IN SUCH A SHORT TIME... AND IT ALL COMES BACK TO YOU.
IT CAN END AS QUICKLY AS IT'S STARTED. I CAN MAKE IT ALL RIGHT AGAIN.
NO ONE TO SAVE YOU THIS TIME, LITTLE BEAST.
LOOK AT HER -- ALREADY UNCONSCIOUS. SUCH A MINIMAL PAIN THRESHOLD. NO WONDER SHE COULDN'T LEAD THE AVENGERS.

NO ONE TO SAVE US.

CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT...
EVERYTHING'S A BLUR...
NOTHING MAKES SENSE...
CAN'T SEE WHAT'S RIGHT...
WHAT'S WRONG...
FALLING FAST...
FATHER...
FORGIVE ME...
NO...
NOT FATHER.
FLIP
CLK
WHIZZZ
CHKK
TOO CLOSE. ANGLE'S WRONG. NO GOOD. BRACE FOR IMPACT. SHIELD THE KID.
LUCKY, DEVIL .. SOMEONE'S ON YOUR SIDE.

NOTHING VITAL DAMAGED. HIP TOOK MOST OF THE BLOW, BUT THAT SAME RIB WENT AGAIN. FEEL LIKE DEATH... BUT STILL ALIVE.
THE BABY'S IN ONE PIECE, TOO. KID SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING ALL THIS. MAKES ME YEARN FOR THE CAREFREE DAYS OF MY OWN CHILDHOOD... BEFORE THE ISOTOPE.
THE PAIN SHOOTS DOWN MY SIDE -- REMINDING ME THAT CHILDHOOD WAS A LONG TIME AGO. TAKES LONGER TO HEAL NOW, OLD MAN.
HURTS LIKE THE DEVIL. CAN'T STOP, THOUGH -- GOTTA FIND THE ONE PERSON WHO MIGHT GIVE ME SOME PERSPECTIVE ON ALL THIS... WHO MIGHT HELP ME GET CLEAR.
PLEASE, GOD... LET HER STILL BE HERE... LOSING IT... NATASHA... I'M SORRY...
REUNIONS... WHY DO WE ALWAYS WAIT... FOR THE WORST TIMES... KAREN...
AND SUDDENLY, IT'S NOT SO DARK ANYMORE... FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS, I FEEL THE GROUND BENEATH ME... BUT IT'S CALLING ME...
MOTHER...

HELP ME...

TWO DAYS LATER, SOMEWHERE UPTOWN...
THIS GROWS IRRITATING --
-- AFTER OVER A YEAR OF STRATEGIC PLOTTING AND THE VAST FORTUNE IT'S TAKEN TO CRAFT THIS, MY SWAN-SONG...
..., TO BE THWARTED BY OUR FOOT-SOLDIERS' INABILITY TO LOCATE A BLIND MAN AND A BABY!
HE'S NOT DEAD, OF THAT I'M SURE. NO -- HE'S THE RESILIENT SORT. LIKE MY OLD FRIEND, THE ARACHNID. THESE PEOPLE NEVER SEEM TO GIVE UP THE GHOST.
THE ARACHNID..., COULD I HAVE BROKEN HIM THIS EASILY?
IT IS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE. I WILL HAVE MY VICTORY OVER MY ADOPTED FOE INSTEAD.
AND WHEN DAREDEVIL LIES BROKEN AT MY FEET, I SHALL PASS FROM THIS WORLD WITH THE AWE I WAS NEVER AFFORDED IN LIFE.
AND OH, HOW THEY'LL WHISPER MY NAME REVERENTLY, IN PLACE OF THE SNICKERING THEY OFFERED THROUGHOUT MY CAREER.
TK
EVEN FISK, THAT BLOATED STREET-THUG.
HOW WRONG HE WAS. IT'S NOT HOPE -- IT'S FAITH THAT CAN DESTROY EVEN THE MOST VALIANT OF HEROES. I WILL SHOW HIM THAT A MAN WITHOUT FEAR, IS A MAN WITHOUT FAITH. AND A MAN WITHOUT FAITH...
..., IS EASILY UNMADE.
KTOK
THE ENDGAME IS FAST APPROACHING, MISTER GABRIEL.
SUMMON THE ASSASSIN.

FEELS LIKE I'VE BEEN SLEEPING FOR DAYS. WHERE AM I?
OH YES -- NOW I REMEMBER.
FEEL FAMILIAR?
YOU'RE AWAKE -- GOOD. YOU'VE SLEPT FOR A SOLID TWO DAYS STRAIGHT. YOU MUST BE EXTREMELY HUNGRY.
I'LL GET YOU SOMETHING TO EAT.
I'M NOT VERY HUNGRY, THANKS.
WASN'T I IN A DIFFERENT ROOM THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE?
YES -- THE DOWNSTAIRS WARD.
THIS IS... MY ROOM.
THAT MUST BE CAUSING SOMETHING OF A SCANDAL -- UNLESS YOU'VE TAKEN TO LETTING OTHER GARISHLY CLAD VIGILANTES INTO YOUR INNER SANCTUM AS OF LATE.
IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL, THEY'LL START CALLING YOU *"SISTER MAGGIE LEOTARD."*
SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHERE'S MY COSTUME?
I'VE WASHED IT. IT'S HANGING IN THE CLOSET.
IT'S QUITE A HEAVY GARMENT. HOW CAN YOU... DO THE THINGS YOU DO... UNDER SO MUCH WEIGHT?
ARE YOU SPEAKING LITERALLY OR FIGURATIVELY, MOTHER?
HER HEART SKIPS A BEAT. I'VE HEARD THIS ONCE BEFORE.
OH NO, CHILD -- I'M NOT A MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'M JUST A SISTER...
LET'S NOT PLAY THIS GAME AGAIN. CAN'T WE DISPENSE WITH THE CHARADE -- JUST THIS ONCE?
HER HEARTBEAT RACES SLIGHTLY, THEN SLOWS AGAIN.
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST THIRTY YEARS...

...I'M LOOKING AT MY MOTHER AGAIN.
YOU'RE AS DIRECT AS YOUR FATHER WAS.
THERE'S *A LOT* OF YOUR FATHER IN YOU, ACTUALLY. YOU REMIND ME OF HIM.
I'M SURE THE BABY ONLY ADDS TO THAT. IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, DAD WAS LEFT WITH A KID ONCE TOO -- WASN'T HE?
IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT, MATTHEW? ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS I HAVEN'T ALLOWED MYSELF TO THINK ABOUT IN ALMOST THIRTY YEARS?
I'M SORRY, BUT I'VE SPENT ALL MY GUILT ON THE MATTER LONG AGO.
GOD GRANTED ME THAT MUCH.
AT LEAST GOD HAS EXTENDED SOME OF HIS COURTESIES TO *ONE* OF THE MURDOCKS. HE CERTAINLY DIDN'T LAVISH ANY ON DAD OR ME.
SON OR NOT, I WON'T TOLERATE ANY BLASPHEMY FROM YOU, MATTHEW!
GOD FORBID YOU CHOOSE YOUR OWN BLOOD OVER YOUR FAITH. IT'S NEVER BEEN YOUR STYLE, HAS IT?
SUCH ANGER FROM SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN GIVEN SO MUCH!

DARKNESS, MOTHER! THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN GIVEN -- A LIFE OF DARKNESS!
SEEING DARKNESS, FIGHTING DARKNESS, *FEELING* DARKNESS!
YOU'LL HAVE TO ***EXCUSE ME*** IF ***I CAN'T*** FIND THE SAME FAITH IN THE SO-CALLED ALMIGHTY THAT YOU'VE FOUND! BUT THEN, I GUESS IT'S EASY FOR YOU TO JUMP TO HIS DEFENSE!
AFTER ALL -- HE LET YOU OFF THE HOOK PRETTY EASILY, DIDN'T HE!
SLAP
Oh GOD...
Oh GOD, I'M SORRY...

SHE GIVES ME SOME CLOTHES THAT'VE BEEN DONATED TO THE MISSION AND MAKES ME SOME TEA.
IT ALMOST MAKES ME CRY.
I TALK FOR HOURS. UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S ABOUT NONE OF THE THINGS I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK HER -- IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CHILD AND THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK.
I TELL HER I'M NOT SURE WHO TO BELIEVE ANYMORE -- WHO TO TRUST.
FINALLY, SHE SAYS...
DID YOU ASK GOD?
MA -- MAYBE IN YOUR WORLD, THAT'S AN OPTION. HOWEVER, IN THE REAL WORLD...
DON'T BE GLIB, MATTHEW.
SORRY, MA'AM.
I KNOW YOUR FATHER RAISED YOU IN THE FAITH.
I ALSO KNOW AFTER READING ABOUT YOUR TWO LIVES OVER THE YEARS THAT YOU WORK ON THE SIDE OF THE JUST.
YOU'RE AN ANGEL, MATTHEW -- NOT ONE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST, GRANTED, BUT A SERVANT OF GOD NONETHELESS. AS SUCH, PLACING YOUR TRUST IN HIM SHOULDN'T TAKE THAT GREAT A LEAP OF FAITH.
ASK GOD WHAT TO BELIEVE.
I... I CAN'T.
MOM -- I'M NOT SURE GOD EXISTS ANYMORE.
MATTHEW -- YOU'RE TOO MATURE TO GET MIRED IN THAT OLD CHESTNUT. AFTER ALL THE THINGS YOU'VE DONE, AND ALL THE THINGS YOU'VE SEEN...
FIGURATIVELY...
HOW CAN YOU EVEN RAISE THAT QUESTION ANYMORE?
HOW CAN YOU NOT?
LOOK BACK AT YOUR LIFE, MOM -- LOOK AT ALL YOUR LOSS. LOOK AT THE PEOPLE YOU MINISTER TO -- THE BROKEN, THE DESTITUTE.
GOOD PEOPLE, I'M SURE, WHO'VE FALLEN ON HARD TIMES, WHILE PEOPLE LIKE THE KINGPIN HAVE PROSPERED -- SOMETIMES OFF THE MISERY OF THE VERY PEOPLE YOU AID!

AFTER EVERYTHING WE'VE BOTH BEEN THROUGH, *HOW* CAN YOU SIT THERE AND DEFEND THE NOTION OF AN ALL-LOVING DEITY WHO'S PREPARING A PLACE IN HIS MAGIC KINGDOM FOR YOU, WHERE ALL THE WRONGS OF YOUR LIFE WILL BE MADE RIGHT?
IT'S A *FAIRY TALE*, ISN'T IT? A JOKE DEVISED A LONG TIME AGO TO KEEP THE DOWNTRODDEN FROM REVOLTING -- TO KEEP THEM *COMPLIANT!*
A JOKE THAT EVEN ALLOWED YOU TO ESCAPE THE GUILT OF ABANDONING YOUR OWN SON!
I EXPECT A VERBAL THRASHING; PERHAPS ANOTHER SLAP. INSTEAD, I HEAR MY MOTHER -- THE SAINTLY SISTER MAGGIE -- SMILE.
AND THAT SMILE...THAT SMILE COMES FROM SOMEPLACE I ONLY WISH I WAS MORE ACQUAINTED WITH. I FEEL HER CALM FILL THE ROOM, AND IT QUELLS MY SELF-INDUCED RAGE SOMEHOW. ALL I CAN THINK TO SAY IS...
HOW CAN YOU JUST... *KNOW*... LIKE YOU DO?
I WANT TO TELL YOU A STORY, MATTHEW. THAT'S SOMETHING I'M ALWAYS SORRY I MISSED WHEN I ENTERED THE CONVENT -- THE SIMPLE JOY OF TELLING MY CHILD STORIES.
THIS STORY IS ABOUT A *KNIGHT* AND A *MONK.*

THEY'RE TRAVELING TOGETHER SILENTLY FOR QUITE SOME TIME, UNTIL FINALLY THE KNIGHT SAYS --
"You live a life of poverty, never knowing the touch of a woman, denying yourself all manner of delights -- all because you believe there is a God. I do not share your faith, so I tear the marrow from the bones of Life, indulging myself at every opportunity. I've broken every law created by man and church, and I fear no consequence, because I don't believe in your God."
"MY QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS THIS --
"What if life ends in the ground, and man is nothing more than meat for worms. You will have wasted your entire life denying yourself for nothing. What if you die and learn there is no God?"
The monk thought about this and shrugged his shoulders, offering, "Then I suppose I will be sad. But tell me this, sir..."
"... WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE...
"... AND YOU FIND OUT THERE IS?"
AND WITH A SIMPLE PARABLE, TOLD AT A MOTHER'S KNEE --
-- I'M A CHILD AGAIN.
THERE'S SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN WAITING TO SEE YOU. SHE'S DOWNSTAIRS. SHE CAME THIS MORNING BEFORE YOU WOKE UP. SHE SAYS SHE "HAD A FEELING" YOU'D BE HERE.
BUT I MUST TELL YOU, SON...
"-- SHE SEEMS VERY DISTRESSED."
KAREN?

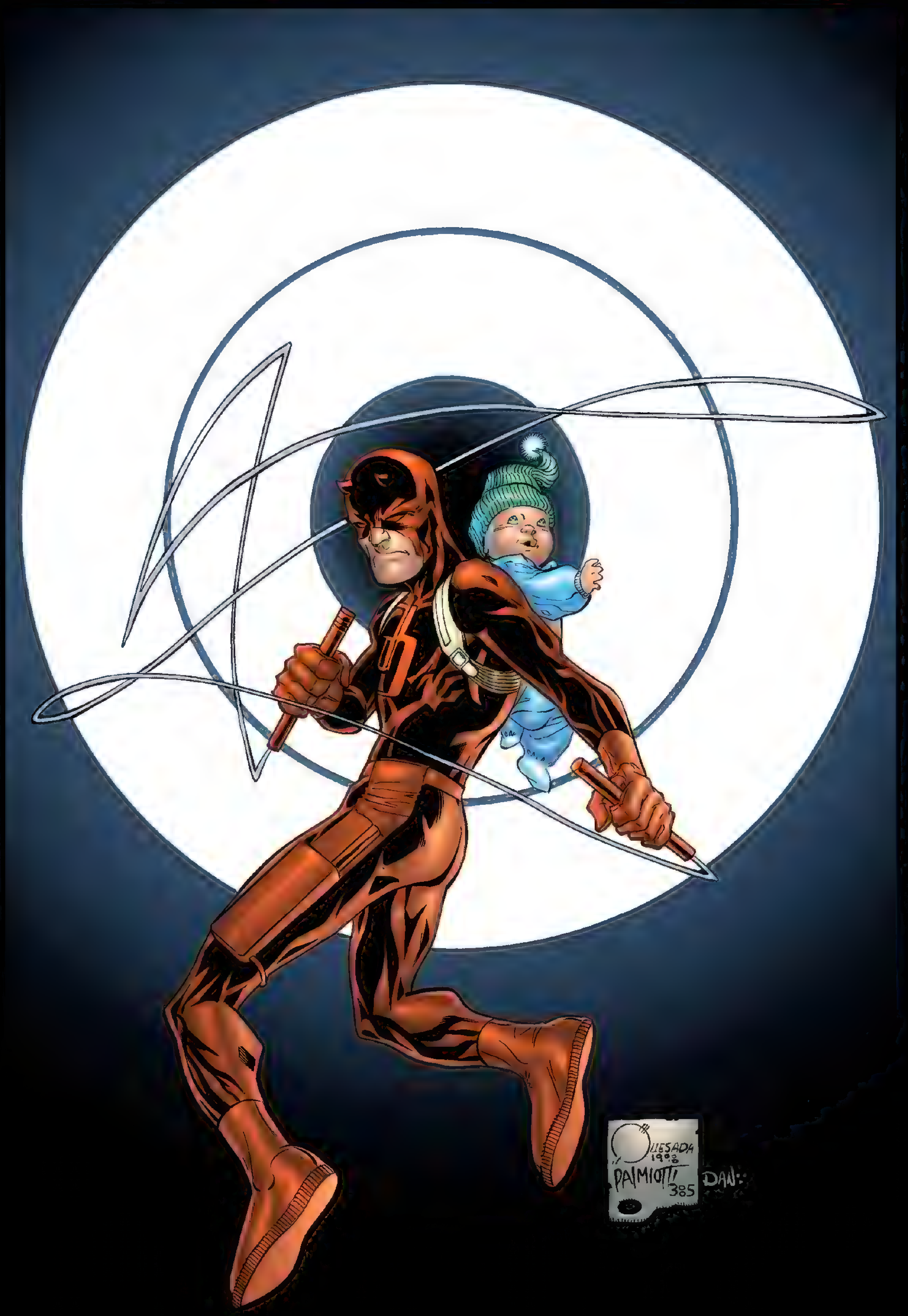
OH, MATT -- ARE YOU OKAY? YOU LOOK...
BRUISED, YES. BUT OTHERWISE FINE. HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS HERE?
WE SHARED A BANK ACCOUNT, MATT -- A GIRL NOTICES THINGS LIKE MONTHLY CHECKS TO A "CLINTON MISSION SHELTER".
NOW YOU KNOW -- THERE WAS ALWAYS ANOTHER WOMAN. IT'S A TRAGIC ROMANCE, REALLY -- I LOVE HER, BUT SHE LOVES THIS GUY WITH LONG HAIR AND A BEARD.
MATT, THE BABY -- WHERE IS IT?
UPSTAIRS. WHY?
I NEED YOU TO GIVE IT TO ME.
I MEAN -- I'M BETTER SUITED TO TAKE CARE OF IT THAN A BUNCH OF NUNS, DON'T YOU THINK?
BESIDES -- THIS PLACE IS TOO DEPRESSING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR A BABY.
I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU, BUT I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HAVE... TOO MUCH ON YOUR MIND ALREADY, WITHOUT HAVING TO BABYSIT SOME KID.
DON'T BE SILLY, MATT. A SWEET LITTLE BABY'D TAKE MY MIND OFF MY... PROBLEMS.
GREAT. I WAS COMING HOME ANYWAY. GIVE ME TWO MINUTES TO...
OH...
OH NO, KAREN... NOT YOU...
I NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT THE BABY.
WHAT? OF COURSE YOU DID. THAT NIGHT -- WHEN I GOT BACK, AND I TOLD YOU ABOUT...
YOU CRIED YOURSELF TO SLEEP. I LEFT EARLY THE NEXT MORNING TO SEE FOGGY.
I NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT THE BABY.
GOOD GOD, KAREN -- WHO GOT TO YOU?

YOUR FRIEND -- THE OLD MAN. HE CAME TO OUR APARTMENT, AND TOLD ME ABOUT THE CURSE. HE SAID THE BABY'S RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING: FOGGY, YOU...
...MY INFECTION.
HE SAID... HE SAID I MIGHT HAVE EVEN INFECTED YOU, MATT.
I DIDN'T ALLOW MYSELF TO THINK ABOUT IT THE NIGHT KAREN TOLD ME. WITH ALL THAT'S HAPPENED OVER THE LAST WEEK, I'VE AVOIDED DWELLING ON IT.
BUT SHE'S JUST BROUGHT IT ALL HOME.
BUT ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS GIVE HIM THE BABY, MATT! IF WE GIVE HIM THE BABY, ALL THE EVIL GOES AWAY!
THAT'S WHAT YOUR FRIEND SAID! IF WE GIVE HIM THE BABY...
NO!!
YOU'RE BEING PLAYED, KAREN! HE'S PLAYING YOU -- LIKE HE TRIED TO PLAY ME!
LIKE HE DID PLAY ME! BUT MY HEAD IS CLEAR NOW! THAT BABY IS STAYING IN MY CARE UNTIL I FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT THE STORY IS!
BUT IT'S EVIL! IT'S RUINING OUR LIVES! LOOK AT ME! I HAVE AIDS. BECAUSE OF THAT BABY!
YOU HAVE AIDS. BECAUSE YOU WERE A JUNKIE, KAREN! A JUNKIE WHO WAS WITH GOD ONLY KNOWS WHO AND HOW MANY PEOPLE!
YOUR CARELESSNESS DESTROYED YOUR LIFE, KAREN -- NOT SOME DEMON-CHILD! AND THAT CARELESSNESS MAY HAVE DESTROYED MY LIFE TOO, FOR ALL WE KNOW!
SO YOU WANT TO BLAME SOMEONE?! THEN BLAME YOURSELF!
GOD...
HELP ME.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR GAME IS, OLD MAN -- BUT I KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP ME FIND OUT.
AND WHEN I DO...

...YOU'RE GOING TO PAY...
WE'LL TALK PRICE IN A MOMENT. FIRST, THE PARAMETERS OF YOUR TASK: I ASK ONLY THAT YOU DELIVER THE INFANT TO ME, AND INFLICT MAXIMUM DAMAGE TO WHEREVER YOU FIND THE WHELP... AND TO WHOMEVER HAS BEEN HIDING IT.
EXCEPT THE VIGILANTE HIMSELF -- HE IS TO BE LEFT *ALIVE.* BATTER HIM AS MUCH AS IT PLEASES YOU, THOUGH -- I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE A FEW AXES TO GRIND.
IT *IS,* AFTER ALL, THE MAIN REASON I SOUGHT OUT A *KILLER* TO PERFORM WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY A *BAGMAN'S* JOB -- YOUR *HISTORY* WITH THE INFANT'S CARETAKER.
FOR THIS SERVICE, I'M PREPARED TO OFFER YOU FIVE MILLION DOLLARS.
DO WE HAVE AN AGREEMENT?
SIR?
FLP
CRACK
PP
CHK
I'M SORRY...
FUP
The CATCHER in the RYE

I HAD TO MARK MY PLACE.
YES -- WE HAVE A DEAL.
"A classic!" –Bryan Johnson
"Awesome!" –Walt Flanagan
"A spellbinding tale." –Scott Mosier
"Too many words, man." –Jay
"......" –Bob

#5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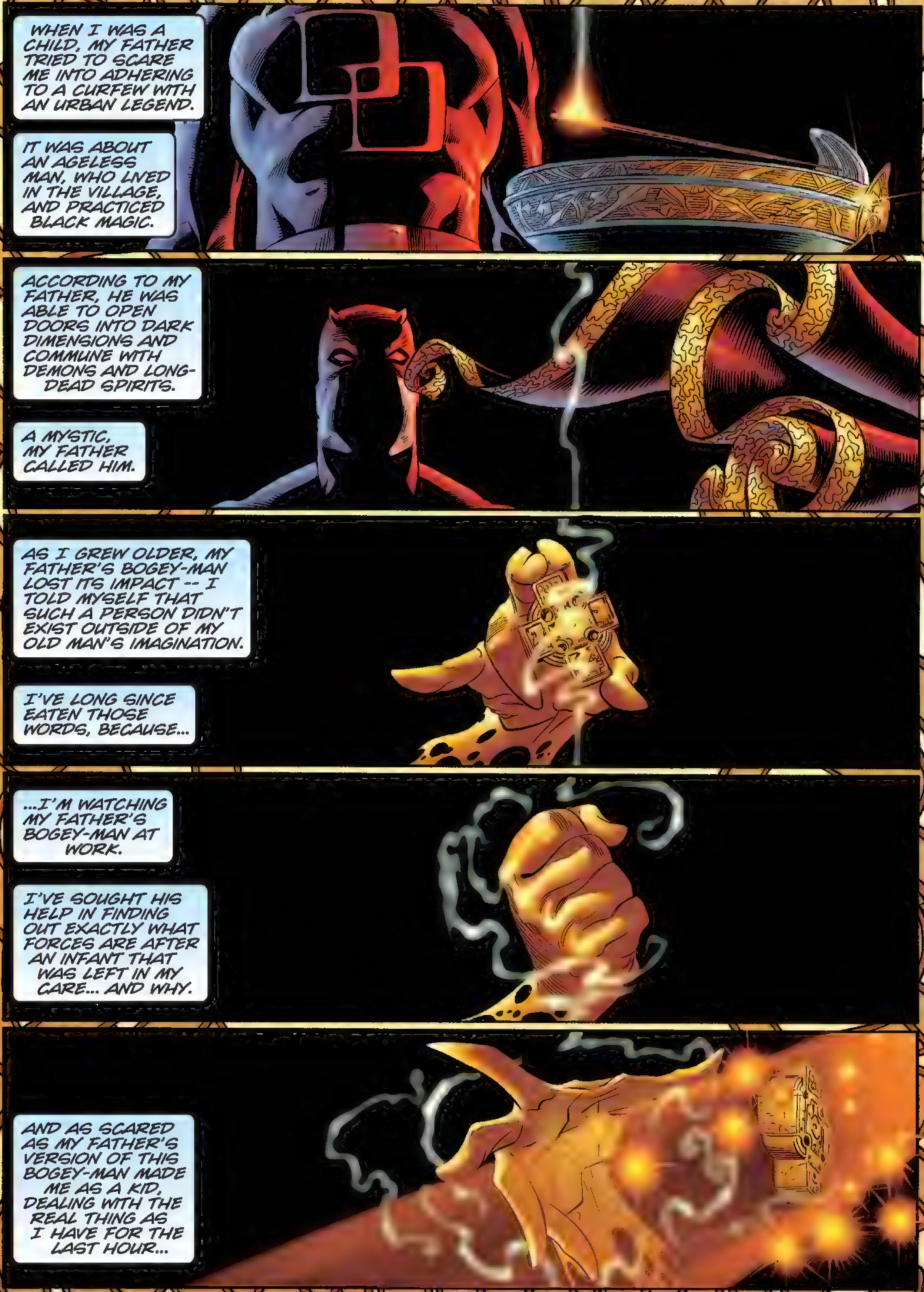

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY FATHER TRIED TO SCARE ME INTO ADHERING TO A CURFEW WITH AN URBAN LEGEND.
IT WAS ABOUT AN AGELESS MAN, WHO LIVED IN THE VILLAGE, AND PRACTICED BLACK MAGIC.
ACCORDING TO MY FATHER, HE WAS ABLE TO OPEN DOORS INTO DARK DIMENSIONS AND COMMUNE WITH DEMONS AND LONG-DEAD SPIRITS.
A MYSTIC, MY FATHER CALLED HIM.
AS I GREW OLDER, MY FATHER'S BOGEY-MAN LOST ITS IMPACT -- I TOLD MYSELF THAT SUCH A PERSON DIDN'T EXIST OUTSIDE OF MY OLD MAN'S IMAGINATION.
I'VE LONG SINCE EATEN THOSE WORDS, BECAUSE...
...I'M WATCHING MY FATHER'S BOGEY-MAN AT WORK.
I'VE SOUGHT HIS HELP IN FINDING OUT EXACTLY WHAT FORCES ARE AFTER AN INFANT THAT WAS LEFT IN MY CARE... AND WHY.
AND AS SCARED AS MY FATHER'S VERSION OF THIS BOGEY-MAN MADE ME AS A KID, DEALING WITH THE REAL THING AS I HAVE FOR THE LAST HOUR...

STAN LEE PRESENTS DAREDEVIL IN
GUARDIAN DEVIL
... IS INFINITELY MORE UNSETTLING.
I SENSE... NOTHING.
WHEN HE SPEAKS, THE HAIRS ON THE BACK OF MY NECK STAND UP. I HAVE TO COMPOSE MYSELF ENOUGH TO ASK...
ARE YOU SURE? THE MAN WHO GAVE IT TO ME CLAIMED TO REPRESENT AN ORGANIZATION CALLED "SHEOL".
HE KNEW THINGS ABOUT ME THAT AREN'T A MATTER OF RECORD.
PART FIVE DEVIL'S DESPAIR
WRITER KEVIN "BISON BURGER" SMITH
JOE "MOZZARELLA STICK" QUESADA PENCILER
INKER JIMMY "MILK SHAKE" PALMIOTTI
RICHARD "CHEESE FRIES" ISANOVE COLORS
RICHARD STARKINGS AND COMICRAFT'S LETTERING DAVE "CARNITAS" LANPHEAR
NANCI "JALAPEÑO POPPER" DAKESIAN EDITOR
EDITOR IN CHIEF BOB "DE LUXE" HARRAS

I ASSURE YOU, DEVIL -- THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO WOULD HAVE REVEALED ANY SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS THIS TRINKET MIGHT'VE BEEN EXPOSED TO.
AS IT STANDS, THE CROSS INDICATES NO MYSTICAL INFLUENCE WHATSOEVER. OF IT, I CAN TELL YOU ONLY THAT ITS MANUFACTURE WAS RECENT...
... AND ALSO, THAT IT'S A POROUS METAL -- WHICH WOULD STAND TO REASON, AS IT WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED TO TRANSFER THE DRUG.
THE DRUG? *WHAT* DRUG?
WELL, SURELY YOU KNEW -- IT'S LACED WITH A CHEMICAL OF SOME SORT -- A SYNTHETIC TOXIN, I BELIEVE.
I ABSORBED A TRACE OF IT INTO MY BLOODSTREAM, AND IT REGISTERED MILDLY AS AN HALLUCINOGEN. I'D IMAGINE THAT EVEN THE SMALL TRACE I'VE BEEN EXPOSED TO WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE ONE HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO SUGGESTION.
BUT IF IT DID CARRY A DRUG, THEN WHY DIDN'T IT AFFECT YOU?
IT WOULD HAVE -- I FELT IT STARTING TO. BUT I WAS ABLE TO CAST A SMALL SPELL THAT PURGED IT OUT OF MY SYSTEM AND INTO AN ALTERNATE DIMENSION WITHIN MY CELL STRUCTURE.
LONG STORY. DON'T ASK.
THE TOXIN IS VOID OF COLOR AND TASTE. IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO HAVE A SCENT, EITHER.
TO BE QUITE HONEST, IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE EYE, I DOUBT I WOULD'VE PICKED UP ON IT AT ALL, UNTIL IT WAS WELL INTO MY BLOODSTREAM.
I'VE BEEN... DRUGGED?
SO IT WOULD APPEAR. AND FURTHER, MY BRIEF INVESTIGATION ON THE ASTRAL PLANE REVEALED NO STIRRINGS IN REGARDS TO A SAVIOR CHILD OF ANY FAITH OR PRACTICE --
-- ESPECIALLY NOT THE CHRISTIAN REDEEMER.
I SHOULD, IN ALL FAIRNESS, ADD THAT MY MYSTIC ABILITIES AS OF LATE HAVE BEEN RATHER --
-- UNDEPENDABLE.

BUT YOU'RE NOT CERTAIN THE CHILD ISN'T WHAT I WAS TOLD?
I APOLOGIZE, DEVIL -- I'M NOT CERTAIN OF MUCH THESE DAYS.
IT... IT CAN'T BE. HE'S WRONG! HE'S...
IN ON IT.
PERHAPS IF YOU WERE TO BRING THE CHILD HERE, I CAN BE OF MORE ASSISTANCE.
YOU'D LIKE THAT, WOULDN'T YOU, OLD WARLOCK? YOU WANT ME TO BRING THE CHILD TO YOU, SO YOU CAN RAISE THE DEMON SEED INTO HUMANITY'S DESTROYER!
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO TRUST A PRACTITIONER OF THE BLACK ARTS.
ESPECIALLY ONE WHO'S, NO DOUBT, EXERTING SUGGESTIVE SPELLS TO CLOUD MY THINKING.
WELL, ALLOW ME TO RETURN THE FAVOR...
...PHYSICALLY!
CRASH
THE TOXIN IS AGAIN ACTIVE IN YOUR SYSTEM!
I'M REMOVING IT WITH THE SAME INCANTATION I USED ON MYSELF.
THERE...
...IT'S GONE.
MY GOD...
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
I FEEL...
... CLEAR.
THANKS, DOC.

IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT, BOSS?
NO NEED FOR ALARM, WONG. OUR FRIEND DAREDEVIL WAS JUST INFECTED WITH A RATHER UNSAVORY TIME-RELEASED TOXIN.
TIME-RELEASED?
YES -- OR RATHER, ASSOCIATIVE-RESPONSIVE.
THE TOXIN HAD ATTACHED ITSELF TO THE SYNAPSES OF YOUR CEREBRAL CORTEX. IT SEEMED TO ACTIVATE UPON SUGGESTION OF THE CHILD'S INNOCENCE AND CLOUDED YOUR ABILITY TO REASON LOGICALLY.
NATASHA...
...I HAVE TO FIND YOU. EXPLAIN MY ACTIONS. I'M SO SORRY.
QUITE A DRUG, THAT ONE. A CRIMINAL ELEMENT COULD PROBABLY MASS-PRODUCE IT FOR CONSUMPTION IN SOCIAL CIRCLES THAT SEEK TO LOWER INHIBITIONS.
YOUR RAVE CLUBS, YOUR COLLEGE FRATS.
STRANGE, I NEED TO KNOW WHO'S BEHIND THIS.
IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY WE CAN FIND OUT BEYOND YOUR INQUIRY ON THE ASTRAL PLANE?
WELL...
...THERE IS ANOTHER WAY...
...THOUGH IT'LL REQUIRE A STRONG CONSTITUTION AND YOUR COMPLETE OBEDIENCE IN OBSERVING THE GUIDELINES I LAY OUT.
IF YOU'RE WILLING TO GIVE IT AN ATTEMPT...
I'M WILLING TO TRY ANYTHING AT THIS POINT.
VERY WELL. IT'LL TAKE A DAY TO PREPARE YOU. WE'LL START IMMEDIATELY.
WONG -- WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO MOVE THE TEA INTO THE CELLAR.
I'M GOING TO INVOKE A DEMON.
BUSINESS AS USUAL AT CASA DE STRANGE.
FOLLOW ME, RED.

So, this is your life, Karen Page.
In your thirty-plus years, you've been your parents' daughter, your grade school's bright, young speller, your high school's straight-A student and cheerleading captain, your college's 3.8 GPA graduate...
...a secretary for a small but earnest law office, a would-be actress, a one-time porn star, a former junkie, a recovering addict, a radio deejay so popular that you've broadcasted from both coasts...
...and now, an H.I.V. carrier.
And what of the men in your life? There've been a number of them, haven't there? And you've been so many things to all of them.
A daughter.
A friend.
A lover.
An object of desire.
A customer.
A voice in the night.
DAILY BUGLE
FRIEND OF ACCUSED QUITS!
STAR LEGAL
And then there's that one guy -- the one to whom you've been all that and more. The one you prized more than anything in your life.
And then betrayed.
And then found your salvation in.
And then abandoned.
Matt
And then sought out when your world shattered.
And then tried to deceive... to save your own skin.
Matt.

It's always been you, Matt. You're the pivot point that's given my adult life balance.
No matter what I've done, or where I've gone, I always come back to you.
In my haste to unload my problems on you, I never thought to ask what was going on in your life--your lives--even after what that Old Man told me.
It's something I've always taken for granted -- you practice law by day, you practice justice by night. And you've always made it seem effortless.
But it's always been bigger than you, hasn't it, love?
You've been able to stay one step ahead of madness or the grave through it all, but how can one step ever be enough? And where's the margin for error?
That's always been the unspoken fear, hasn't it, Matt? The thing that'd plague you in your sleep, when I held you on the rare nights you were home...
That one day, you'll stumble, and whatever darkness laps at your heels will swallow you whole.
Is this that time, love? Is the darkness bearing down closer than it ever has? And are you running out of strength to stay ahead of it?
You need me, Matt -- now more than ever. You need my strength to ally with your own, and maybe then we can both outrace the void.
And in order to give you my strength, I have to muster it -- not collapse into your arms, hoping you'll fix it all again. I've spent most of my life -- our life -- doing that, haven't I? Perhaps this is the time that instead of collapsing -- either of us -- we should be leaning on one another... as equals.
A partnership. One that -- for the first time in years -- can be built on level ground. Two broken souls, that, together, can be whole.
I need you now, yes -- more than ever.
But you need me -- just as much.
MURDOCK QUITS! (CONT)
MURDERER?
Foggy Nelson gained media attention as an associate of Hell's Kitchen vigilante Daredevil
'CURTAIN' CALL
One-time "Creature Fea
King" John Curtain
found murdered in
Hollyw me

THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM OF STEPHEN STRANGE...
THE GOOD DOCTOR OFFERED ME NOSE PLUGS.
IT SEEMS THAT WHEN A DOORWAY TO HELL IS OPENED, THE STENCH CAN BE SO OVERWHELMING THAT IT'S BEEN KNOWN TO ASPHYXIATE THOSE WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY.
APPARENTLY, THE BASEMENT DEATHS OF AT LEAST EIGHT TO TEN AMATEUR MAGICIANS PER YEAR THAT ARE CHALKED UP TO RADON GAS ARE MISREPORTED.
I'VE BEEN INSTRUCTED NOT TO ADDRESS THE VISITOR WHEN IT SHOWS UP. STRANGE TOLD ME THAT EVEN ONE VERBAL MISSTEP IN A CONVERSATION WITH A DEMON COULD RESULT IN FREEING IT FROM WHATEVER BINDING CIRCLE THAT KEEPS IT IN CHECK.
STRANGE SAID HE'D SUMMON THE DEMON WITH A DEAD TONGUE-- A TONGUE RECORDED IN ONLY ONE EIGHT-THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD MANUSCRIPT HE KEEPS LOCKED IN A VAULT OF A SWISS BANK UNDER AN ASSUMED NAME.
HE SAID IT'D BE BEST TO AVOID EYE CONTACT WITH THE BEAST -- AS YOU WANT TO DO AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE TO PROVOKE A DEMON.
STRANGE SAID A LOT OF THINGS...
FWAAASSH
...BUT HE NEGLECTED TO MENTION WHO HE WAS SUMMONING.
WHO CALLS ME TO THIS DISMAL PLACE?
I DON'T NEED EYES TO KNOW WHO'S STANDING BEFORE ME.

WHO DARES TO SUMMON MEPHISTO?
PRIMITIVE...
...WHAT MANNER OF FOOL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS CLOWNISH PRISON?
YOU ARE CALLED HERE BY A MAGUS OF THE HIGHEST ORDER FOR AN INQUISITION.
STRANGE. I RECOGNIZE YOUR BRAYING.
WE HAVE DANCED AS THIS BEFORE, BUT NEVER WITH BLINDERS. WHAT PROMPTS THIS SECRECY NOW?
ZZZT
WITHIN THE BINDING CIRCLE, YOU MAY ASK OF ME NO QUESTIONS, AND PROVIDE ONLY ANSWERS, BEAST.
AH -- YOU'RE PLAYING THE ROLE WITH ALL THE STOPS PULLED OUT, AREN'T YOU, MYSTIC?
THIS ISN'T A CONVERSATION -- IT'S A PERFORMANCE.
HE DOESN'T REMEMBER ME.
YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED MEPHISTO BEFORE?
I KNOW THIS THING, YES.
THEN YOU KNOW HOW DANGEROUS HE IS. I'VE ENCODED AN OBSTRUCTION INTO THE BINDING CIRCLE. HE'LL BE UNABLE TO SEE US, THOUGH I DON'T KNOW FOR HOW LONG.
DO NOT RESPOND. DO NOT SPEAK.
ZZZT
YOU'VE BROUGHT A FRIEND, I GATHER. BUT YOU'RE SO TERSE WITH YOUR UNSEEN GUEST, GOOD DOCTOR.
WHAT IS IT THAT DISTURBS YOU, STEPHEN?
MEPHISTO LAUGHS QUIETLY. IT RATTLES STRANGE'S NERVES -- I HEAR HIS PULSE RISE AND THEN CALM AGAIN, AS HE REGAINS HIS COMPOSURE AND SAYS...
BEAST, THERE ARE THOSE WHO PURPORT THAT THE CHRISTIAN REDEEMER HAS RETURNED TO THIS PLANE AS AN INFANT. I COMMAND YOU WHO STANDS WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THIS BINDING CIRCLE TO TELL ME IF THERE IS ANY VALIDITY TO THEIR CLAIMS.
AND THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU OFFER A LIE, LEST I CLOSE THIS WINDOW, AND RETURN YOU TO PERDITION.

YOU SAY THAT AS IF IT'S A THREAT.
BUT I'LL PLAY YOUR VOCAL-APE'S GAME, STRANGE -- IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN IT AMUSES ME TO DO SO AT THIS TIME.
SO YOUR COMPANION WANTS TO KNOW IF JOHN'S FORETOLD APOCALYPSE IS NIGH, eh? IF I HAD A SOUL FOR EVERY TIME I'M ASKED THAT QUESTION...
ANSWER THE QUERY, PIT-DWELLER -- OR THIS CONFERENCE IS AT AN END.
WHY IS ONE SO MIGHTY AS MYSELF BROUGHT HERE TO INSTRUCT AS A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER? HAVE YOUR CHRISTIAN FRIEND READ HIS BIBLE -- MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE APOSTLE JOHN'S BOOK OF REVELATIONS. WHEN THE SO-CALLED SON OF GOD RETURNS, PRESUMABLY TO END HIS FATHER'S FLOUNDERING EXERCISE...
... THE BLUNDER KNOWN AS MANKIND...
... IT WON'T BE AS HE CAME ORIGINALLY. IN A RARE FIT OF GOOD SENSE, HE IS PROPHESIED TO RETURN NOT BORN OF A LOWLY WOMAN, BUT AS JUDGE, JURY, AND EXECUTIONER -- AS A LION, NOT A LAMB. AS THAT WHICH WILL END YOUR WORLD AND DELIVER THE PURE TO HIS FATHER... AND THE REST TO US.
NOW, I'M NO LITERARY MAJOR, BUT I'D SAY THE TEXT IS INDICATING A FAR DIFFERENT MANIFESTATION OF THE SO-CALLED REDEEMER THAN AS A HUMAN INFANT, WOULDN'T YOU, MY INQUISITIVE FRIEND OF STRANGE?
MY GOD... HE'S RIGHT. BIBLICALLY, THE SAVIOR IS TO COME BACK AS HE LEFT -- A MAN.
PROVE TO ME YOUR OMNISCIENCE, MEPHISTO, AND REVEAL WHO IT IS THAT SOWS THESE UNTRUTHS.
WHY, STEPHEN -- HAS SOMEONE TRICKED YOUR FRIEND INTO BELIEVING THE INFANT SAVIOR'S BEEN LEFT IN HIS CARE? CAN YOUR FRIEND REALLY HAVE BEEN SO...
... BLIND?
HE KNOWS.

HE KNOWS WHO I AM!
I'M CLOSING THE PORTAL!
HELLO AGAIN, BLASPHEMER -- HE WHO WOULD CALL HIMSELF A DEVIL AND DO THE WORK OF THE JUST! WOULD THAT I COULD CROSS THE THRESHOLD OF THIS BINDING CIRCLE, I WOULD TAKE MORE THAN YOUR VISION!
BUT THAT IS A PLEASURE ONE OF YOUR FELLOW MEATLINGS HAS BEATEN ME TO. OH, YES -- HE'S TAKEN FAR MORE THAN YOU ALREADY KNOW.
WHO?!
DEVIL! NO! THE PORTAL IS ALMOST CLOSED!
WHO IS DOING THIS TO ME?! WHAT MORE HAVE THEY TAKEN?!
GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT, VIGILANTE -- THOUGH I WILL TELL YOU THIS: I'M RESERVING A CHOICE SEAT IN THE PIT FOR THE ONE WHO'S MAKING OF YOUR LIFE A HELL ON EARTH. HE'S MORE THAN EARNED IT.
WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE OF THE THIRD-RATER? NOT ME, NOT HIS PEERS... PROBABLY NOT EVEN HIS OWN MOTHER.
HOW DELICIOUS THAT MUST BE -- THE BROKEN-HEART OF THE HARLOT THAT SIRED YOUR NEMESIS! HOW SHE MUST HAVE HARBORED SUCH HIGH HOPES FOR A CHILD WHO FESTERED INTO A LIAR, A THIEF, A MURDERER OF MEN, AND A KILLER OF CHILDREN. THE DISGRACE MUST HAVE HER SPINNING IN HER GRAVE.
ALMOST THERE...
BUT SOONER OR LATER, IT HAPPENS TO EVEN THE BEST CHILDREN, DOESN'T IT, BLASPHEMER?
SOONER OR LATER, EVERY SON LETS HIS MOTHER DOWN.
NO...
...MOM...
POP
HAHAHA HA HA HA HI HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

THE CLINTON MISSION SHELTER...
I HAVE TO CHOKE BACK THE BILE THAT'S RISING IN MY THROAT.
THE ROOM REEKS WITH THE STENCH OF SILENCED TERROR AND DEATH.
THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN I'M ALMOST GLAD I CAN'T SEE.
WRY
THIS IS ONE OF THEM.
Uhn...
D... DARE... DEVIL...
MAGGIE!
DON'T MOVE...
HE... KILLED SISTER THERESA FIRST... WITH HER OWN ROSARY BEADS...
HE SAID... HE SAID HE'D KILL US... ONE BY ONE... IF WE DIDN'T GIVE HIM THE BABY... BUT I... HID HER...
THE THINGS HE DID... TO SISTER ANNE...
I HAVE TO KNOW WHEN HE LEFT, MAGGIE.
WHEN DID HE LEAVE?
♪ WHEN A BODY MEETS A BODY, COMING THROUGH THE RYE... ♪
HE DIDN'T.
WRY -- AIN'T IT, RED?
IF YOU'RE THE LITERARY TYPE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CALL THIS ONE, DEVIL.
I CAN'T GET A BEAD ON HIM. THE ACOUSTICS IN THE OLD CHURCH ARE THROWING ECHOES BACK AT ME.
NO? C'MON -- IT'S TOO EASY...
IT SOUNDS LIKE IT'S COMING FROM...
THERE.
YOU'RE THE CATCHER. GET IT?
YOU'RE THE CATCHER IN THE WRY.
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT EVERY GOOD CATCHER NEEDS?

A PITCHER!
THE FIRST THREE ARE DISTRACTIONS...
...FOR THE FOURTH.
THIS ONE WAS MEANT FOR MY JUGULAR.
CRAZED SONOVA...
KRAK
FAP
FLFLP
ANYTHING'S A WEAPON IN HIS HANDS.
TAK TAK
THE TEETH WERE MEANT FOR MY EYES.
SAME OL' RED. THAT'S WHY I CAME PREPARED THIS TIME.
I'M TIRED OF THIS VENDETTA BETWEEN YOU AND ME -- IT'S A WASTE OF MY TIME. YOU'RE THE ONLY GUY WHO'S EVER COME CLOSE TO GETTING ON MY NERVES.
HATE ADMITTING IT, BUT YOU'RE ALMOST MY BETTER.
SO IN AN EFFORT TO AFFORD MYSELF HALF A SHOT...
... I'M GONNA HAVE TO SUBVERT MY PRINCIPLES A BIT.
KA-BLAMM

UNNFF!
NOW WE'RE EVEN.
THE PAIN...
...WORSE THAN WHEN NATASHA SHOT ME.
DROWN IT OUT, MURDOCK.
HAVE TO KEEP BULLSEYE AT BAY.
YOU LITTLE... HYUUUUKK!
RUMOR HAS IT HIS SKELETON IS REINFORCED WITH ADAMANTIUM.
THAT BLOW CONFIRMED IT.
YOU WANNA WALK AWAY FROM THIS? YOU'LL GIMME THE KID. I AIN'T GETTING PAID TO KILL YOU...
...BUT I'M GONNA DO YOU FOR FREE.
JUST FOR LAUGHS.
GO TO HELL...
I ALREADY WROTE THAT TICKET...
...WITH ALL THE DEAD NUNS.
SPAP
SISTER!
KAREN...
WE'VE GOTTA GET YOU OF HERE!
NO, CHILD...
YOU MUST GO... GET HELP. HE'LL KILL MATTHEW...
...IF HE DOESN'T GET... THE CHILD...
THWAK
SISTER...
...WHERE'S THE BABY?

I'M WEAKENING...
...I'M NOT GOING TO BEAT HIM...
TELL ME WHERE THE KID IS, AND I'LL DO YOU QUICK!
MOTHER... I'M SORRY...
MOTHER...?
GIMME THE KID!
KRAKK
LET HIM GO!
LET HIM GO...
... AND I'LL GIVE YOU THE BABY.
WELL, WELL, WELL...
BIG HAND, FOR THE LITTLE LADY.
KAREN! NO...!
SPAK
PIPE DOWN, PUNCHY!
WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF NEGOTIATIONS!

EVENIN', MISS. NOW LEMME GET THIS STRAIGHT...
YOU WANNA TRADE THE NEWER MODEL FOR THE OLD BEATER?
IF YOU LET HIM LIVE, THE BABY IS YOURS.
IF WE HAVE A DEAL, STEP AWAY FROM DAREDEVIL.
WHAT CAN I SAY? I'M A SUCKER FOR THE LADIES.
THWACK
ANOTHER TIME THEN, RED.
HOW ABOUT WHEN WE'RE DONE HERE, YOU LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT A GREAT SHOT I AM?
JUST TAKE THE BABY AND GET OUT.
KAREN... YOU CAN'T...
THIS IS EASIER THAN TAKING CANDY FROM A...

YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN' ME, LADY.
HOW COULD YOU DOUBLE-CROSS ME LIKE THAT?
IN A CHURCH, NO LESS.
THOCK
UUUUH!
WAAAH WAAAH
DON'T...!
WHERE THE HELL IS THE BABY?!?
WAAAH WAAAH
WELL WHAD'YA KNOW?
OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES, AS THEY SAY.

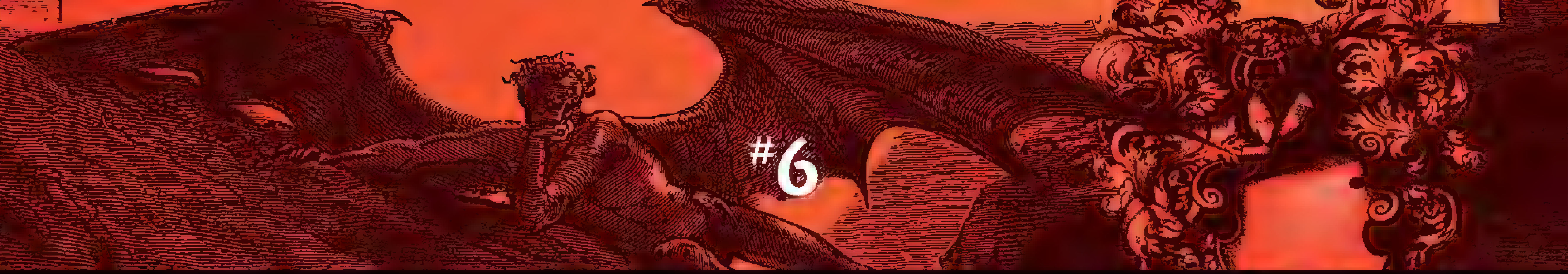
A PAGE FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BULLSEYE, SISTER...
NO ONE RISES FROM THE DEAD!
STOP!
PUT... THE BABY... DOWN!
MAN, YOU'RE A PERSISTENT BROAD.
FIRST RULE IN THE *"CLEANING"* BUSINESS...
CLIK
NEVER DISCARD A *LOADED* WEAPON.

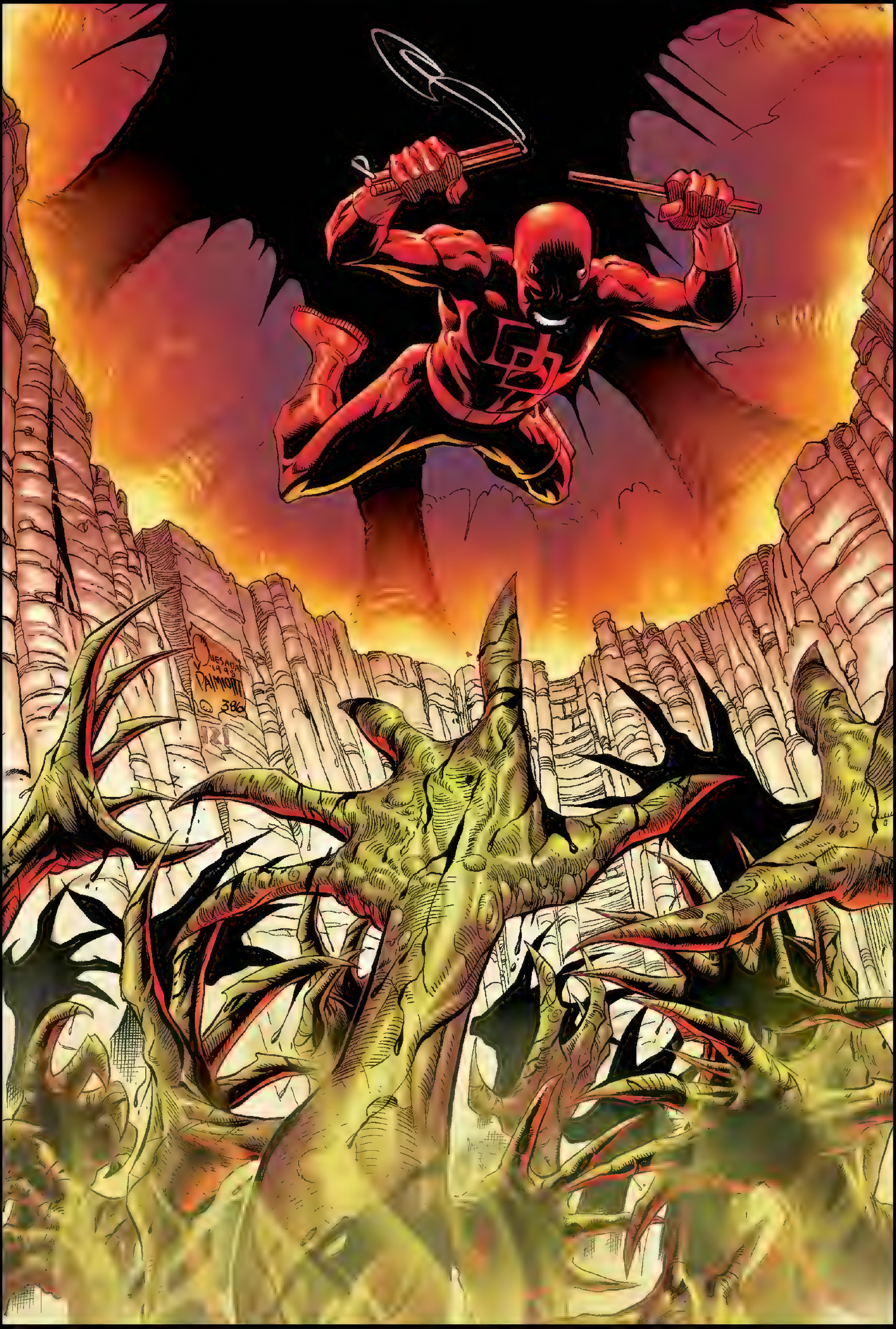
I ONLY BROUGHT ONE BULLET, LADY. HOW'DYA THINK I GOT THE NAME?
YOU GOT CHUTZPAH, KID -- AND FOR THAT, I'M GONNA LET YOU LIVE.
'NIGHT, NOW.
WAIT A SECOND...
WHERE ARE MY MANNERS?
I ALMOST LEFT WITHOUT GIVING RED BACK HIS...
...CLUB!
MATT!!!
KAREN!!!

NOOOOOOO!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.
I MISSED.
HAHAHAHA HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
OH MY GOD, KAREN! PLEASE GOD, NO!
I HEAR THE BLOOD FORCING ITSELF OUT OF THE HOLE IN HER CHEST.
MATT...
NO, BABY -- DON'T TRY TO TALK. JUST...
I'LL GET...
I... LOVE...
I TRY NOT TO HEAR HER.
HEARING HER MEANS KNOWING.
KAREN... I...
I'LL...
I'LL... MISS YOU...
AND...
...WITH THAT...

...SHE'S GONE.

#6





RADIO PERSONALITY KAREN PAGE AND ELEVEN OTHERS SLAIN IN MISSION MASSACRE
A BUGLE EXCLUSIVE BY BEN URICH
Six nuns and five indigents were found dead in a Clinton Mission Shelter in what has been described as the worst hate-crime in the nation's history.
While the NYPD has yet to issue a statement, the Bugle has learned that the victims were bludgeoned, stabbed, and otherwise butchered. Twelve survivors were rushed to Saint Vincent's Hospital, where they are being treated for severe injury and trauma.
ANGEL OF MOURNING
Even more baffling, however, was the discovery of radio personality Karen Page amidst the dead.
Page, well known as the one-time host of the p.m. broadcast 'Angel of the Night', had no apparent ties to the Mission. In fact, the former New Yorker had relocated to Los Angeles some months before, where her show was broadcast on a WFSK affiliate.
NEW YORK'S FINEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
It is not yet known whether Page was visiting someone in the shelter when the murders occurred, or if indeed perhaps Page herself was the focus of the attack.
What connection, if any, this attack has to last week's Infanticide at Saint Anthony's Hospital in midtown has yet to be determined.
TOUCHÉ, MY PRESTIDIGITATOR FRIEND.
TOUCHÉ.
BUGLE
IT'S A FAR CRY FROM A NURSING HOME SCAM.

ISOPROPYL ALCOHOL
DAILY BUGLE
NEW YORK'S FINEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
ANGEL OF MOURNING
RADIO PERSONALITY KAREN PAGE AND ... SLAIN IN MISSION MASSACRE
MR. MURDOCK AS PER YOUR REQUEST Peter Parker
"PUT IT DOWN."

COME AGAIN?
PUT IT DOWN, RIGHT NOW.
HOW MANY TIMES ARE WE GOING TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION?
ARGUMENT, MATT -- IT'S NOT A CONVERSATION WHEN ONE PARTY DRESSES UP IN TIGHTS AND JUMPS OUT A WINDOW.
A SHIPMENT'S SUPPOSED TO BE ARRIVING AT 9:00 ON THE DOCKS.
THE BOAT'S COMING INTO ONE OF THE KINGPIN'S SLIPS.
THEN PHONE IT INTO THE POLICE. THEY FIGHT CRIME *TOO* -- THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE *PAID* TO DO.
THE KINGPIN ALREADY OWNS MOST OF THE COPS.
MOST, NOT ALL. AND I'LL BET YOU *KNOW* WHICH ONES HE DOESN'T ALREADY OWN... DON'T YOU, COUNSELOR?
A FEW OF THEM...
YOU'RE NOT JUST A GUY AND A COSTUME, MATT -- YOU'RE THE GUY *IN* THE COSTUME.
I'LL NEVER TELL YOU TO HANG IT UP, BUT I *WILL* ASK THAT YOU CALL IN SICK, ONCE IN A WHILE.
AND TODAY, OF ALL DAYS, I'D SAY THE SCALES TIP IN MATT MURDOCK'S FAVOR.
EVEN VIGILANTES TAKE THEIR BIRTHDAYS OFF.
SO START DIALING.
YOU ALWAYS PLAN ON BEING THE VOICE OF REASON?
I HAVE TO IF I PLAN ON BEING Mrs. MATT MURDOCK.
YOU KNOW I'LL BE DEMANDING A PRE-NUP. I'M A LAWYER, AFTER ALL.
WELL THEN...
... LET ME HELP YOU OUT WITH YOUR *BRIEFS*, COUNSELOR.

"I LOVE YOU, MATT."
I LOVE YOU, KAREN.
AAAAGGGGHHH!

STAN LEE PRESENTS
GUARDIAN DEVIL
PART SIX
THE DEVIL DIVESTED
KEVIN SMITH
WORDS
JOE QUESADA
PICTURES
JIMMY PALMIOTTI
INKS
RICHARD ISANOVE
COLORS
RICHARD STARKINGS AND COMICRAFT'S LIZ AGRAPHIOTIS
LETTERS
NANCI DAKESIAN
BOB HARRAS
CHIEF
"WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO STOP?

WHEN YOU DON'T FIND ME SEXY ANYMORE, I GUESS.
NOT *THIS*. THIS -- THIS *LIFE*, WHERE LESS THAN AN HOUR AFTER WE MAKE LOVE, YOU'RE JUMPING OFF ROOFTOPS AND BEATING PEOPLE UP.
Oh... *THAT*.
I GUESS WHEN I...
... WHEN *WE*...
... HAVE A CHILD. I ALWAYS ASSUMED I'D QUIT WHEN THERE WAS A KID TO THINK ABOUT.
REALLY?
SURE. IT'S ONE THING TO HAVE *YOU* WAITING AT HOME FOR ME, HOPING I COME BACK ALIVE. I MEAN, YOU'RE AN ADULT --
-- YOU'RE AWARE OF WHAT I DO...
... AND YOU STILL *CHOOSE* TO BE INVOLVED WITH ME.
A KID, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULDN'T HAVE A CHOICE. AN INFANT COULDN'T SAY MY NIGHT JOB WAS *"SUICIDAL"* AND LEAVE ME FOR ANOTHER PARENT. IT'D BE STUCK WITH ME AS A DAD.
WHEN I MAKE THE DECISION TO BE A PARENT, I THINK I OWE IT TO MY CHILD TO BE THERE FOR IT, AS LONG AS IT NEEDS ME. I'D SAY THAT LEAVES VIGILANTISM OUT FOR GOOD.
BESIDES -- THERE ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH COSTUMES IN THIS CITY TO PICK UP THE SLACK. SPIDER-MAN ALONE COULD COVER THE KITCHEN IN MY PLACE.
I CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE YOUR BABY. I'LL BE AN EXCELLENT MOTHER -- I PROMISE.
I'M COUNTING ON IT.
THEN I NEED TO COUNT ON YOU FOR SOMETHING.
NAME IT.
DON'T EVER QUIT.
EXCUSE ME?
IT'S A BAD WORLD OUT THERE, MATT. AND WHILE YOU CAN NEVER CHANGE THAT, YOU AT LEAST MAKE IT SAFER TO WALK AROUND IN.
EVERY TIME I LEAVE THE HOUSE, NIGHT OR DAY, I'M NEVER SCARED. BECAUSE I KNOW *YOU'RE* OUT THERE, LOOKING OUT FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME.
YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO *ENTERTAIN* THE NOTION OF BRINGING A CHILD INTO THIS WORLD. IF THERE WEREN'T PEOPLE LIKE YOU -- THE *GOOD* ONES WHO RUN AROUND IN PAJAMAS...
THEY'RE CALLED *"TIGHTS"*, DEAR.
... BEATING DOWN THE *EVIL* PEOPLE WHO RUN AROUND IN PAJAMAS -- I DON'T KNOW IF I'D EVER EVEN *THINK* ABOUT HAVING A BABY.

SO PROMISE ME, NO MATTER WHAT, THAT YOU'LL NEVER STOP!
I'LL TAKE CARE OF OUR CHILD...
...AND YOU MAKE SURE THERE'S SOME SANITY OUT THERE FOR OUR CHILD TO GROW UP IN.
NEVER STOP, MATT.
NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER WHAT.
"NO MATTER
I WON'T, KAREN.
I WON'T.
HE'LL BE COMING SOON.
PREPARE THE GAUNTLET.

ENNIS' TAVERN, DOWNTOWN...
TELL THIS GUY THAT STORY YOU TOLD ME LAST NIGHT. THE ONE ABOUT HOW YOU *KILLED* DAREDEVIL THAT ONE TIME!
DRINK DILLON ALE!
YEAH, LET'S HEAR IT!
NAILS
C'MON, TURK!
ALLRIGHT, ALLRIGHT -- IT'S STORY-TIME.
SO ONE NIGHT, I FOLLOW HIM HOME -- BACK TO HIS... HIS...
HIS *DEVIL-CAVE*, RIGHT? IT'S LIKE HIS SECRET BASE, WHERE HE'S GOT A MILLION T.V.'S THAT WATCH OVER THE CITY. BUT I GOT THE DROP ON HIM, 'CAUSE HE TOOK HIS UTILITY BELT OFF.
THAT'S HOW HE'S ALWAYS BEATIN' GUYS -- WITH HIS STUPID UTILITY BELT.
WHERE DOES HE GET THOSE WONDERFUL TOYS?
I DUNNO, MAN -- BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY OF 'EM THAT NIGHT. THAT'S WHEN I COLD-COCKS THE FREAK...
AND THEN I TIES HIM TO THIS...
THIS... *GIANT DINOSAUR* HE'S GOT.
I THINK IT WAS SOME KINDA TROPHY OR SOMETHING -- I DUNNO.
SO THEN I PROCEED TO GUT THAT PUNK, LIKE A FISH! I STICK THE KNIFE IN, AND I CUT HIM ALL THE WAY OPEN. AND HE SCREAMS LIKE A...
STUCK PIG?
YEAH! HE'S SQUEALING LIKE "*BABE*" OR SOMETHING, AND I'M LIKE "*THIS IS FOR ALL MY PEEPS YOU EVER PUT AWAY!*" AND THEN HE...
BEAT ON YOU UNTIL YOU GAVE HIM SOME INFORMATION?
WHAT?!? YOU CRAZY, MAN! I...
HEY, MAN -- WHERE IS EVERYBODY? I WASN'T...
...FINISHED.

DON' LEMME GO, MAN!
DON' LEMME GO!
IT'S YOUR TURN TO "SQUEAL LIKE A PIG", TURK.
BULLSEYE'S IN TOWN. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT?
I DON' KNOW NOTHIN' 'BOUT NO BULLSEYE!
THEN I DON'T KNOW HOW TO KEEP YOU FROM HITTING THE PAVEMENT.
ALLRIGHT! ALLRIGHT! HE WAS HERE! BUT THEN HE SPLIT!
HE LEFT THE CITY?
HE JETTED, MAN, I SWEAR! I THINK HE DID THOSE NUNS THE OTHER NIGHT! AND THE RADIO-LADY!
WHO HIRED HIM?
CREEEK
WHOA, MAN, STOP IT!
SOME GUY'S BEEN TAKING ON ALL THE LOCAL HELP FOR THE LAST MONTH! HE HIRED HIM! HE'S GOT A LOTTA PEOPLE ON THE PAYROLL!
A NAME, TURK.
I DUNNO HIS NAME! SOME OLD DUDE, I HEAR!
I AIN'T SEEN 'EM, 'CAUSE HIS BOYS WOULDN' HIRE ME!
BUT I HEAR HE'S GOT ALOTTA MONEY AND A MEAN-ON FOR YOU AND SOME BABY!
YOU SAID HIS PEOPLE DIDN'T HIRE YOU. WHERE DID YOU GET TURNED DOWN?
CREEEK
AT HIS BUILDING, MAN! 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH! IT'S WHERE ALL THE HEAVY-HITTERS ARE MEETIN' TONIGHT!
WHAT "HEAVY-HITTERS"?
HE HIRED EVERYONE WHO WAS AVAILABLE FOR TONIGHT, 'CEPT ME! WORD IS HE'S GOT SOMETHING BIG GOIN' DOWN!
YOU WANNA TEAM UP, MAN?! LIKE OLD TIMES?! YOU AND ME, DD! HUNH? HOW 'BOUT IT?!
HEY MAN...

"WHERE YOU AT?!"
I GOT HIM, MISTER MACABES.
PEOPLE -- ONCE DAREDEVIL ENTERS THE BUILDING, I'LL BE TRANSMITTING YOUR INSTRUCTIONS ON THE HIGH-FREQUENCY CHANNELS. MAKE YOUR ADJUSTMENTS ACCORDINGLY.
MISTER CALIFORE...
... SHOOT TO WOUND, ONLY.
I'M GOING TO ENJOY THIS.
HEARD EVERY WORD.
POK
KRAK
UUGFF!
SHUNF
FAP
"THAT'S MY BOY..."

LET'S GIVE HIM A HAND...
FOR A MILLISECOND, I ALMOST BELIEVE IT'S THEM.
WZZZ
BUT IF IT WAS THE HAND, I'D HAVE NEVER HEARD THEM COMING.
THEY'RE BARELY BROWN BELTS, ANY OF THEM.
THEY SMELL OF CHEAP LIQUOR AND CHEAPER DRUGS.
BUT MORE THAN THAT...
...THEY SMELL OF FEAR.
YOU'LL HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN THIS, MACABES...
SEVENTEEN SECONDS AFTER IT STARTS, I'M THROUGH YOUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE.

HE'LL BE COMING YOUR WAY SHORTLY, MISTER GABRIEL. MAKE YOUR PREPARATIONS.
BOOP
WHITE NOISE
WHITE NOISE.
KILLS WHAT LITTLE CHANCE I HAD OF ZONING IN ON THOSE HIGH FREQUENCIES HE TALKED ABOUT.
NO ELEVATOR CAR.
THE BULLET FROM BULLSEYE RENDERS MY RIGHT ARM USELESS.
SKREEEE
GOING TO HAVE TO MAKE IT UP THERE THE HARD WAY.
WELL, VIGILANTE...
BOOP
DOOR 3
...YOU WOULD TAKE ON THE POWERS OF HELL TO RESCUE A WHELP YOU'RE NOT EVEN SURE IS STILL ALIVE?
THERE ARE EASIER WAYS IN WHICH TO ATONE FOR ONE'S TRANSGRESSIONS, YOU KNOW.
SHOOMP
BOOP
HELL

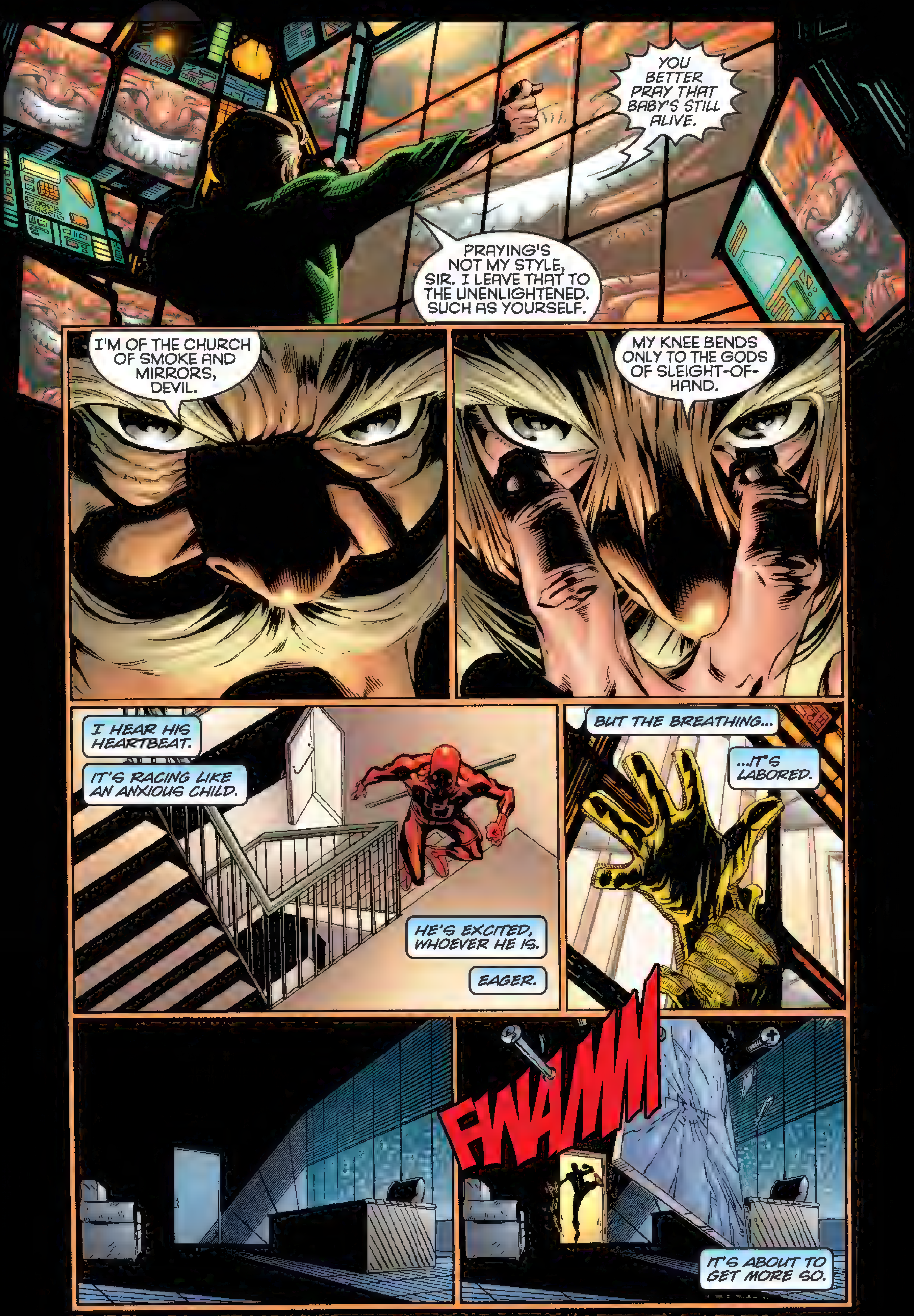
JUST ASK THESE POOR SOULS
HELP US!
SAVE US, SIR!
HAVE PITY!
FREE US!
THE CHORUS OF THE DAMNED IS DEAFENING.
THE FLAMES ARE SCORCHING THE SOLES OF MY FEET.
AND THERE ARE FIFTY FLOORS TO GO.
THAT'S WHEN I HEAR HER...
MATT... PLEASE...
HELP ME!
DON'T LEAVE ME TO ROT IN THE PIT! SAVE ME LIKE YOU ALWAYS HAVE!
CAN'T LET IT...
...OH GOD...
...KAREN...
...I'M SORRY...
I SPENT MOST OF MY ADULT LIFE LISTENING TO KAREN'S HEARTBEAT...
YOU DID THIS TO ME! YOU SENT ME HERE! HOW CAN YOU LEAVE ME IN THIS PLACE?!
HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN TO ME?!
...RISING AND FALLING, IN CALM AND IN PASSION.
THIS... THING...
...ITS HEARTBEAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE KAREN'S.
WAIT A SECOND...
...ITS HEARTBEAT?
NOOOOOOOO
RRRIIPP

IT SEEMS YOU NEED ME AFTER ALL, LITTLE DEVIL.
BE THANKFUL THE ALMIGHTY MADE ME YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL.
YOU'RE MY... GUARDIAN ANGEL?
SINCE YOU WERE BORN. I WAS ONLY ABLE TO MANIFEST MYSELF WHEN MACABES MADE HIS MOVE FOR THE CHILD. THEN MY MISSION BECAME TWOFOLD -- PROTECT YOU, AS ALWAYS...
...AND STOP MACABES. COME! WE HAVEN'T MUCH TIME.
FRAPAPP
HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?
ETHEREAL TECHNOLOGY. I OPENED AN INTER-DIMENSIONAL PORTAL. IT'S HOW WE ANGELS GET FROM PLACE TO PLACE.
IS THE BABY STILL ALIVE?
YES. MACABES CAN'T KILL UNTIL MIDNIGHT, WHEN A DEMON'S POWERS ARE AT THEIR APEX. EVEN NOW, THE BEAST MAKES PREPARATIONS TO END THE SAVIOR'S LIFE, AND BRING ABOUT AN UNHOLY APOCALYPTIC COUP OF HEAVEN!
DOWN!
IF MACABES' WILL IS REALIZED, HE'LL ENSLAVE HUMANITY AND GOD ALIKE. THE FORCES OF THE PIT WILL RISE AGAINST THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, AND FEAST ON THE BONES OF THE JUST!
HIS WORDS WOULD HAVE GREATER IMPACT...
...IF I WASN'T SO PREOCCUPIED WITH WHAT I PULLED OFF THAT THING IN THE ELEVATOR.

IT'S NOT FLESH.
IT'S A SYNTHETIC.
IT SMELLS LIKE...
...WAIT...
...I'M SUDDENLY PICKING UP THE BUZZ OF A HIGH FREQUENCY TRANSMISSION. IT'S ...
BRATATTATATTATTA
WE'VE BEEN SPOTTED! PREPARE FOR THE BATTLE!
OOOF!
URK!
THEY'RE HUMAN! GO FOR THE HEART OR HEAD!
YES.
IT'S ALL STARTING TO GEL.
IN GOD'S NAME, DIE!
HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO BLIND?
KRAK
I SEND THEE BACK TO PERDITION!
I PRAY I'M WRONG.
SHUCK!

BUT I KNOW...
SPAP
SPAP
...I'M CERTAIN...
FAP
...I'M RIGHT.
SNAP
COME, BROTHER -- WE MUST...
AAHHA!
I FIND THE NERVE CLUSTER IN THE SOLAR PLEXUS OF THIS 'GUARDIAN ANGEL' AND SQUEEZE.
IT'S A MOVE THAT CAN KILL IF TOO MUCH PRESSURE IS APPLIED.
UKKKK
I FIGHT THE URGE TO TWIST A MILLIMETER MORE TO THE RIGHT, AND INSTEAD RELEASE HIM.
THE 'ANGEL' FALLS.

THE 'ANGELIC SHRIEK' IN THE ROOM HE'D IMPRISONED ME IN THREW ME COMPLETELY OFF BALANCE THE FIRST TIME I FOUGHT THIS GUY.
COUPLE THAT WITH THE DRUG I'D INGESTED FROM MACABE'S CROSS'S CALLING CARD...
RRRIIPP
...AND IT'S EASY TO SEE WHY I DIDN'T PICK UP ON THE FACT...
...THAT I WAS FIGHTING ANOTHER COSTUME.
BZZT
BZZT
SCORE ONE FOR YOU, VIGILANTE.
BUT THE NIGHT...
... Oh, THE NIGHT IS STILL YOUNG.
MY LIFE UPHEAVED. MY MOTHER BEATEN.
THE WOMAN I LOVED, KILLED.
AND FOR WHAT?
SO SOME LUNATIC COULD PLAY DRESS-UP?
YOU BETTER PRAY, WHOEVER YOU ARE...

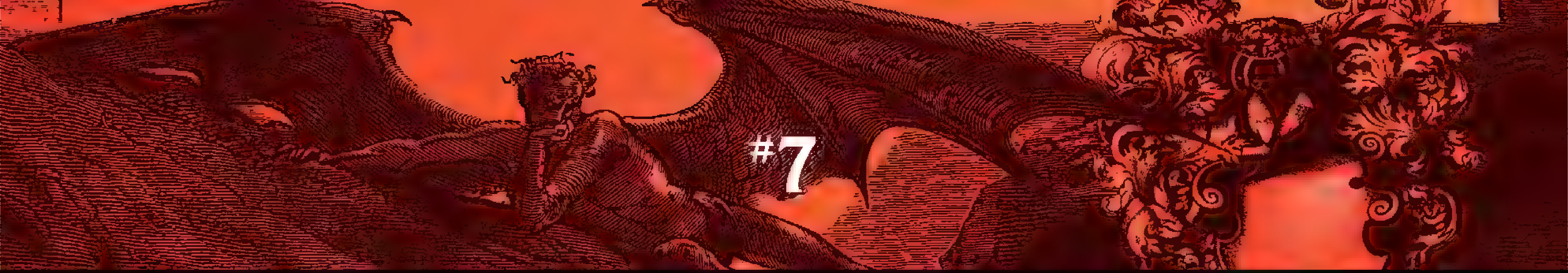

YOU BETTER PRAY THAT BABY'S STILL ALIVE.
PRAYING'S NOT MY STYLE, SIR. I LEAVE THAT TO THE UNENLIGHTENED. SUCH AS YOURSELF.
I'M OF THE CHURCH OF SMOKE AND MIRRORS, DEVIL.
MY KNEE BENDS ONLY TO THE GODS OF SLEIGHT-OF-HAND.
I HEAR HIS HEARTBEAT.
IT'S RACING LIKE AN ANXIOUS CHILD.
HE'S EXCITED, WHOEVER HE IS.
EAGER.
BUT THE BREATHING...
...IT'S LABORED.
FWAMM
IT'S ABOUT TO GET MORE SO.

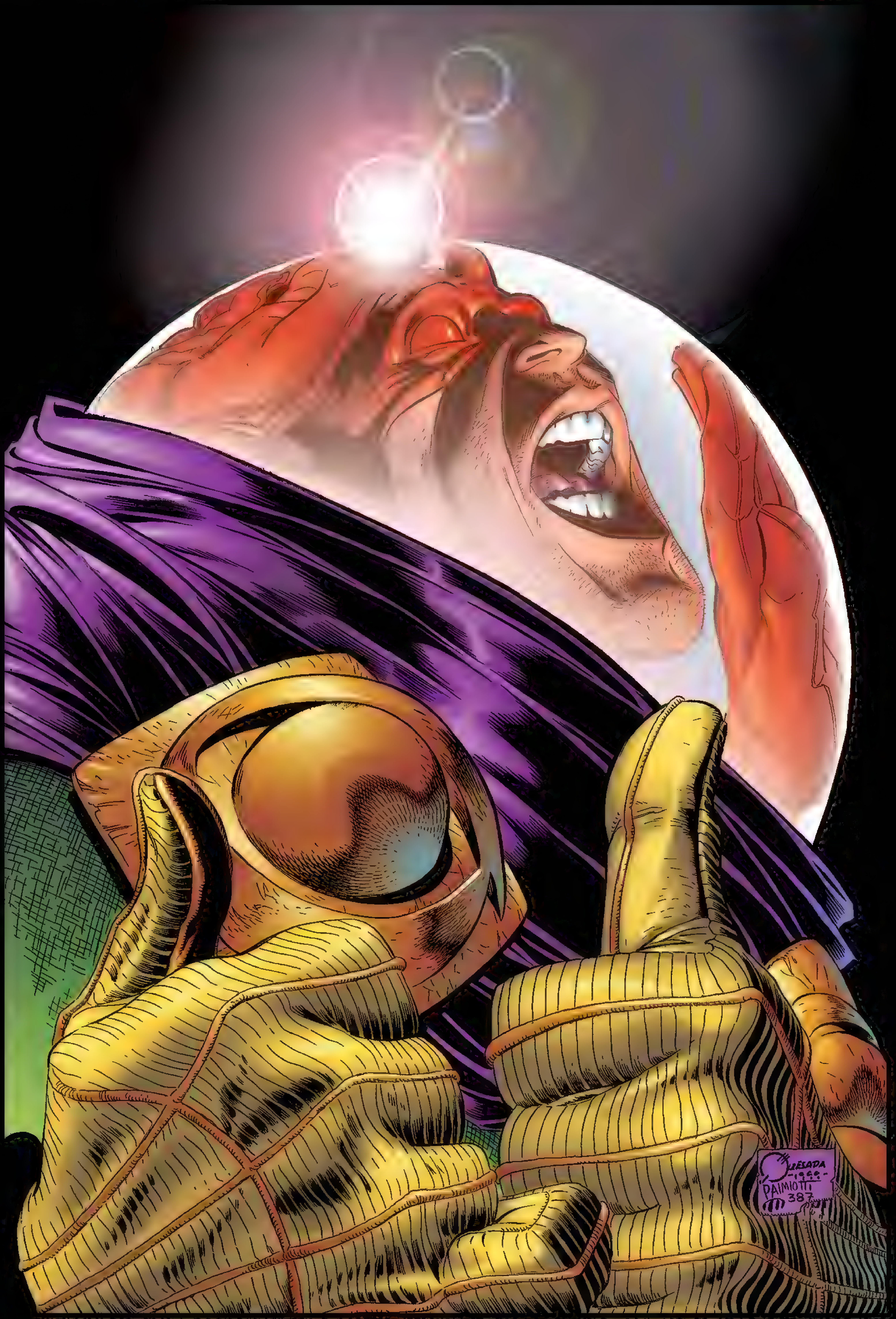
MY, MY, MY...
WASN'T THAT FITTINGLY DRAMATIC.
BUT I CAN'T COMPLAIN, NOW CAN I? I'VE BEEN PROVIDING THE DRAMA FOR SO LONG, THUS FAR. IT'S ONLY FAIR THAT YOU BRING SOME OF YOUR OWN.
THE THING ABOUT DRAMA, THOUGH, THAT YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER, DAREDEVIL...
IT'S ALL IN THE EYES.
KEEP TALKING.
KEEP GIVING ME SOMETHING TO FOCUS ON.
WHICH DOOR, SIR? THE LADY OR THE TIGER?
THERE.

HOW INCONVENIENT -- AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.
BZZZT
BZZZT
BZZZT
AND ME WITHOUT MY FACE ON.
SHOW YOURSELF.
VERY WELL, SIR. AFTER ALL...
YOU'VE CERTAINLY PAID THE *PRICE* OF ADMISSION.
FIRST RULE OF SHOWBIZ, MY SIGHTLESS FRIEND...
REGARDLESS OF THE SIZE OF YOUR AUDIENCE...
ALWAYS MAKE AN ENTRANCE, BOY...

ALWAYS MAKE AN ENTRANCE!

#7




QUESADA
-1999-
PALMIOTTI
387

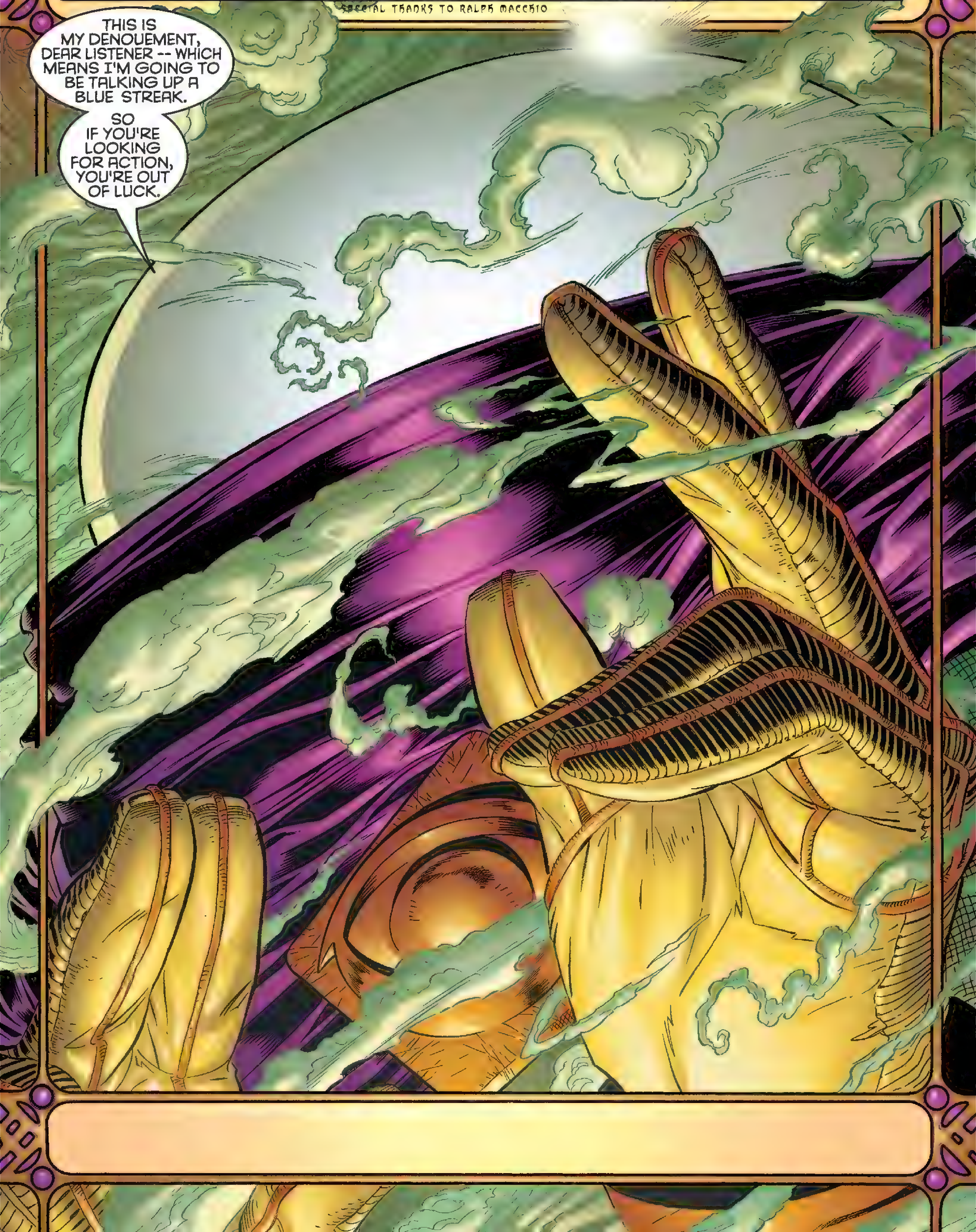
STAN LEE FILMS PRESENTS

GUARDIAN DEVIL

PART SEVEN

THE DEVIL'S DEMON

SCREENPLAY BY KEVIN SMITH
DIRECTED BY JOE QUESADA
PRODUCED BY JIMMY PALMIOTTI
LIGHTING BY RICHARD ISANOVE • SOUND BY RICHARD STARKINGS AND COMICRAFT'S LIZ AGRAPHIOTIS • STARRING NANCI DAKESIAN • AND FEATURING BOB HARRAS AS THE CHIEF
SPECIAL THANKS TO RALPH MACCHIO


THIS IS MY DENOUEMENT, DEAR LISTENER -- WHICH MEANS I'M GOING TO BE TALKING UP A BLUE STREAK.
SO IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ACTION, YOU'RE OUT OF LUCK.

COULDN'T CARE LESS WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY...
Oh SHOOT...
POOMP
I'M ONLY INTERESTED...
DOOP
OOF!
... IN ENDING YOU.
FZP
D... DON'T FOR... FORGET...
DON'T FORGET THE CHILD...
DAMN HIM...
IF YOU WANT TO STAY ALIVE, YOU'LL TELL ME WHERE THE BABY IS.
CAN'T TELL YOU THAT JUST YET, DEVIL. HOWEVER, I WILL TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO INFORM YOU THAT THIS SUIT IS WIRED TO ENHANCE MY STRENGTH.

SMAK
UUH!
NOW -- YOU WERE INQUIRING ABOUT THE CHILD'S WELFARE.
THE CHILD HAS BEEN SECURED IN A SOUNDPROOF, VACUUM CHAMBER, SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE BUILDING.
THE UPSHOT IS THAT EVEN YOUR HEIGHTENED SENSES WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DETECT HER.
THE DOWNSHOT IS SIMPLE PHYSICS, REALLY.
YOU SEE, IN ORDER TO CONSTRUCT THE SOUNDPROOF CHAMBER, WE NEEDED TO CREATE THE VACUUM. AND IN ORDER TO CREATE THE VACUUM, WE NEEDED TO ELIMINATE AIR -- IN THIS CASE, OXYGEN.
FROM THE MOMENT YOU SMASHED INTO MY SANCTUM, THE CHILD HAD TWENTY MINUTES TO LIVE.
YOU WASTED FIVE BEATING ON ME.
WASTE ANY MORE OF MY TIME, AND YOU SIGN THE INFANT'S DEATH WARRANT.
WISE CHOICE, HERO. MAINTAIN THAT JUDICIOUS DECISIVENESS, AND I VOW -- I SHALL SPARE THE CHILD'S LIFE.

TK
SHHHPPPP
IN THE MEANTIME, I WONDER IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND ACCOMPANYING ME AS I MAKE MY ROUNDS. THERE ARE A FEW PLOT THREADS THAT NEED TO BE TIED UP BEFORE CURTAIN CALL.
IT TAKES WHAT LITTLE CONTROL I HAVE LEFT TO STAY MY HAND...
BUT I CAN'T PICK UP ANY HINT OF THE BABY. IF SHE'S STILL ALIVE, MY ONLY CHANCE OF SAVING HER IS TO INDULGE THIS TWISTED ANIMAL.
IF SHE'S STILL ALIVE.
THIRTEEN MINUTES LEFT.
IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING.
DAMN HIM...

I SUPPOSE IT'D BE TOO PRESUMPTUOUS TO ASSUME YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT ME -- BEYOND YOUR MOST RECENT DISCOVERIES, OF COURSE.
NO -- NO ONE'S EVER GIVEN ME MUCH THOUGHT, I'D WAGER. WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, I'M NOTHING MORE THAN THE GUY WITH THE FISH BOWL HEAD.
TYPICAL.
WELL, THEN LET'S TEST YOUR FILMIC ACUMEN, SHALL WE?
YOU'VE HEARD OF SPIELBERG? LUCAS? CAMERON?
HOW ABOUT QUENTIN BECK?
NO -- I THOUGHT NOT.
THE OTHERS -- WELL, THEY'VE TINKERED WITH PEDESTRIAN, TWO-DIMENSIONAL IMAGERY IN THE PICTURES, OF COURSE. ALL WITH GREAT SUCCESS. BUT QUENTIN BECK...
HE'S CRAFTED THREE-DIMENSIONAL ILLUSIONS SO INCREDIBLE AND INTIMIDATING, THEY'VE MANAGED TO PROVIDE THEIR CREATOR WITH MORE WEALTH THAN ALL THE GROSSES OF THE AFOREMENTIONED GENTLEMEN'S FILMIC ENDEAVORS COMBINED.
BUT I'LL BET YOU EVERY PENNY OF THAT ACCUMULATED FORTUNE THAT IF YOU POLLED A HUNDRED PEOPLE IN THE GREATER METROPOLITAN AREA -- NOT TO MENTION THE WORLD -- AT LEAST NINETY PERCENT OF THEM WILL NEVER FORGET THE IMAGES OF...
... A CHEAP, RUBBER SHARK JUMPING ON A BOAT...
... A GLORIFIED FLASHLIGHT CUTTING AN OLD MAN IN A BATHROBE DOWN...
... OR A RICKETY ROBOT FIRING A SEMI-AUTOMATIC.

"AND THE PERCENTAGE OF FOLKS WHO'LL RECALL THE *REALITY* OF A GIANT SPHINX TOUCHING DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF TIMES SQUARE?
"LESS THAN ONE."
QUENTIN BECK, I PRESUME.
NONE OTHER THAN.
YOU SEE, IT'S NEVER WRITTEN ABOUT, BUT IT WAS MY GREAT STRIDES IN SPECIAL EFFECTS THAT AIDED THE POSTER BOYS OF THE FIELD IN DOMINATING THE INDUSTRY AND WINNING OSCARS.
"WERE IT NOT FOR MY EXPERIMENTATION WITH UNTESTED LATEXES AND CHEMICALLY TREATED FACIAL APPLIANCES, THE STAN WINSTONS AND THE RICK BAKERS OF THIS WORLD WOULD BE CLERKING AT CONVENIENCE STORES.
BOB AND JAY DESTROY JAPAN
DARK FANTASY
SIGHTINGS
LATEX
"BUT WHY ISN'T MY NAME UTTERED AMONGST THESE SO-CALLED PIONEERS OF THE FIELD? BECAUSE I CHOSE TO TAKE THE ILLUSIONS OFF THE SCREEN... AND TAKE IT DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE.
"TIME AFTER TIME, I TRIED TO SHOW THE COMMON JOE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL... SOMETHING MAGICAL. AND WHAT DID I GET FOR MY EFFORTS?
"THE MONIKER OF 'BUBBLE-HEAD.'
"THE CATEGORY OF 'SECOND-STRINGER.'
"AND COUNTLESS DEFEATS AT THE HANDS OF THE PERENNIALLY PERKY SPIDER-MAN EITHER SOLO...
"OR ACCOMPANIED BY MY FELLOW NE'ER-DO-WELLS IN ONE OF OUR MANY INCARNATIONS OF THE SINISTER SIX.
THE "SINISTER SIX"...
HOW SAD.

BUT I'D RATHER NOT REGALE YOU WITH TRITE TALES OF WHY I BECAME *THAT* BAD EGG. NO -- I'M SURE YOU'RE FAR MORE INTERESTED IN WHY I BECAME *YOUR* BAD EGG.
"IT ALL STARTS WITH A VISIT TO THE RAVENCROFT PHYSICIAN, AFTER I COUGHED UP SOMETHING RATHER... SICKLY.
KOFF *KOFF*
QUENTIN, I'M AFRAID THE PROGNOSIS ISN'T WHAT WE WERE HOPING FOR.
"WE WERE HOPING THAT IT WASN'T A TUMOR.
"BUT A LIFETIME SPENT ABSORBING THE POISONOUS BASES OF THE LATEX APPLIANCES I USED TO MASK MYSELF...
"... AND YEARS OF INGESTING THE CHEMICALS I USED TO CREATE MY SIGNATURE SMOKE, HAD LEFT AN IMPRESSION ON MY INNARDS.
"I GOT THE BONUS PACKAGE: A BRAIN TUMOR AND LUNG CANCER. BOTH COMPLETELY INOPERABLE.
I WAS GIVEN A YEAR... MAXIMUM.
"THEY BEGAN THE PAPERWORK TO RELEASE ME ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. I WAS DECLARED SANE, AND BASED ON MY CONDITION, JUDGED AS A MENACE TO SOCIETY NO LONGER.
"THE RAVENCROFT CHAPLAIN OFFERED ME SOBER ADVICE AS I DEPARTED THAT DAY...
TAXI DUTY
TRUST IN GOD, QUENTIN. DISMANTLE YOUR CRIMINAL PAST AND SEEK HIM OUT.

"GRIEF-STRICKEN, FRUSTRATED AND DESPONDENT, I TOOK HALF HIS ADVICE.
"YOU WOULD IMAGINE THAT OVER THE COURSE OF A LIFE SUCH AS MINE, ONE WOULD AMASS MORE THAN COULD BE DESTROYED IN MERELY HOURS. SURPRISINGLY, IT TOOK NO LONGER THAN TWO.
"BUT THEN, AT THE END OF MY TANTRUM -- AN EPIPHANY OF SORTS.
"HERE I SAT, SURROUNDED BY EVIDENCE OF A LIFETIME SPENT HAND-CRAFTING WONDERS. I WAS AN ARCHITECT OF ILLUSIONS. THE LORD OF THIS FANTASTICAL WORLD. A GOD, EVEN.
"AND I WAS SUDDENLY CONTENT TO HAVE MY DEMISE HANDED TO ME BY CELLULAR MUTINY?
"NO -- MYSTERIO WOULD NOT SUCCUMB TO SOME PEDESTRIAN DISEASE. INSTEAD, HE WOULD FACE HIS UNDOING IN A SUITABLY DRAMATIC BATTLE TO THE DEATH WITH HIS MOST HATED FOE.

"BUT ALAS -- IN MY ABSENCE, THE WORLD HAD COME TO KNOW AN ARACHNID I WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH.
BUGLE
NEW YORK'S FINEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
SPIDER-MAN?!?
"BASED ON ALL I'D BEEN READING IN THE BUGLE, THIS WAS NOT *MY* SPIDER-MAN. AND HOW POETIC COULD IT POSSIBLY BE TO TAKE FINAL ARMS AGAINST SOME KIND OF... FOR LACK OF A BETTER DESCRIPTION...
... "CLONE?"
MY GRAND FANTASY OF A SWAN SONG SEEMED LIKE A PIPE-DREAM.
UNTIL I REMEMBERED YOU.
"WE'D CLASHED ONCE, AFTER THE AVENGERS WERE THOUGHT DEAD, AND THE BIG APPLE SEEMED RIPE FOR THE PLUCKING. YOU SAW TO IT THAT MY INSURANCE SCHEME MET WITH A QUICK AND UNPROFITABLE END."
I WAS SURPRISED AND IMPRESSED BY YOUR SKILLS, IN RETROSPECT. BUT THEN THERE WAS SOMETHING *MORE* ABOUT YOU THAT APPEALED TO ME.
YOU WEREN'T REGARDED MUCH OUTSIDE OF HELL'S KITCHEN. UNLIKE SPIDER-MAN, YOURS WAS NOT A REPUTATION THAT WAS KNOWN THE WORLD OVER.
I LIKED THAT.
YOU WERE LIKE ME.
A SECOND STRINGER.
AND SO I SET ABOUT INVESTIGATING THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK.

"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN SEEKING AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KINGPIN WOULD COST ONE A MINIMUM OF A MILLION DOLLARS.
"BUT WHEN A MAN LOSES HIS EMPIRE...
... "YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW FAR TEN THOUSAND WILL GET YOU.
SPEAK QUICKLY. I DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN WITH YOU.
IT'S MY DIME, WILSON. IF MY MONEY'S NO GOOD HERE...
GET TO THE POINT.
I'M LOOKING TO BARTER FOR ANY AND ALL INFORMATION YOU HAVE ABOUT THE VIGILANTE DAREDEVIL. I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE OFTEN CLASHED WITH HIM.
IT WOULD HELP ME IMMENSELY IN MY ENDEAVORS IF YOU COULD PROVIDE ME WITH DATA I CAN USE TO STRATEGIZE AGAINST HIM IN MY LATEST CAMPAIGN.
WHAT IS IT THIS TIME, BECK? ANOTHER INSURANCE SCAM FIASCO?
PERHAPS THAT TIRED NURSING HOME SWINDLE YOU'RE SO FOND OF?
GO HOME. YOU'RE NOT IN THE MAN'S LEAGUE. HE'LL BEAT YOU WITHIN AN INCH OF YOUR BUBBLE-HEADED LIFE.
MY DEAR WILSON -- I'VE NO INTEREST IN AN OLYMPIC CONTEST OF STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE WITH THE MAN.
I SEEK TO DRIVE HIM MAD.
"IT WAS AN IDEA THAT APPEALED TO HIM.
"FOR A MILLION DOLLARS, HE TOLD ME EVERYTHING HE KNEW.

EVERYTHING.

"AND SO I BEGAN TO PLOT THE GREATEST UNDOING OF A MAN THERE EVER WAS.
"BASED ON THE DATA I WAS ABLE TO SECURE ABOUT YOU, I DECIDED SOME OF THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION WOULD MAKE FOR THE BEST APPROACH WITH AN OLD ALTAR-BOY SUCH AS YOURSELF.
"SO, ACTING ON THE OTHER HALF OF THE RAVENCROFT CHAPLAIN'S ADVICE, I SOUGHT THE HELP OF THE LORD.
HOLY BIBLE
"INITIALLY, I WAS HESITANT. I FOUND OUT YOU WERE RAISED BY YOUR BOXER-FATHER IN THE CHURCH...
SWIPTO FINE ART SCULPTING CLAY From the RED BANK of NEW JERSEY
THE ART OF KIRBY
"HOWEVER, LIKE ANY GOOD, LAPSED CATHOLIC, OUTSIDE OF CHRISTMAS AND THE OCCASIONAL CONFESSION, YOU DON'T SPEND MUCH TIME INSIDE GOD'S HOUSE ANYMORE.
"BUT HOW'S THE OLD SAYING GO? YOU CAN TAKE THE BOY OUT OF CHURCH...
"BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE THE CHURCH OUT OF THE BOY.
"AND ONCE I SET THE STAGE FOR MY PASSION PLAY, ALL I NEEDED WAS THE PLAYERS.
"LIKE YOUR POOR LITTLE GWYNETH. SO YOUNG AND MISGUIDED.
"SHE, TOO, WAS RAISED IN A FAITH -- A FAITH I WAS ABLE TO USE TO MY ADVANTAGE IN DECEIVING THE YOUNGSTER WHEN I HAD HER ABDUCTED, DRUGGED, AND ARTIFICIALLY INSEMINATED.
"CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT -- IN THIS DAY AND AGE OF WONDER AND SCIENCE -- SHE ACTUALLY *BELIEVED* HER PREGNANCY WAS DIVINE?
"BEFORE HER PARENTS COULD ORDER A BLOOD TEST OR INVESTIGATE THE MATTER FURTHER AFTER THE CHILD'S BIRTH...
"... I HIRED SOME OF THE MORE RUTHLESS LOCAL THUGS TO CARRY OUT MY OWN PERSONAL SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS.

"FEEDING THEIR DAUGHTER HALLUCINOGENIC IMAGERY THAT POINTED HER IN YOUR DIRECTION SEALED YOUR FATE THAT DAY, MISTER MURDOCK.
"WHILE HER FATE WAS SEALED WHEN I HAD NO FURTHER USE FOR HER CHARACTER.
"THEN THERE WAS LYDIA McKENZIE -- THE WOULD-BE ACTRESS WITH AN INSATIABLE DRUG HABIT.
"SEEMS YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM *THAT* TYPE, Eh, DEVIL?
"A FIX OR TWO A DAY, AND SHE'D TELL YOUR ASSOCIATE, FRANKLIN NELSON, ANYTHING I NEEDED THAT SOLD HER AS A WOULD-BE, HIGH SOCIETY DIVORCÉE.
"IT WAS NO GREAT TASK SLIPPING NELSON A MICKEY THAT'D INSURE HE SAW A SIDE OF LYDIA THAT DIDN'T QUITE EXIST...
"AND A LITTLE BAD HORSE SAW TO IT THAT LYDIA *HERSELF* CEASED TO EXIST.
"CEASING TO EXIST WAS SOMETHING THE GREAT JONATHAN CURTAIN -- THE MAN WHOSE FACE AND FORTUNE I CO-OPTED -- CARRIED OUT AS MASTERFULLY AS THE WORK HE BUILT HIS CAREER ON.
"IT WAS THRILLING TO MEET A MAN WHOSE WORK I'D SO ADMIRED FOR DECADES, AND EVEN MORE THRILLING TO SEND HIM TO HIS GREAT REWARD... SO THAT I MIGHT CLAIM MINE. HE'D INVESTED HIS EARNINGS WISELY, SO HE LEFT BEHIND A RATHER SIZABLE ESTATE WHICH I WAS ABLE TO ACCESS IN HIS STEAD.

IT WASN'T NECESSARY TO DISGUISE MYSELF FOR YOUR BENEFIT, I REALIZED. BUT I COULDN'T RISK THE CHANCE THAT SOMEONE WITH FUNCTIONING PEEPERS MIGHT RECOGNIZE QUENTIN BECK AND SPOIL MY GREAT AND SECRET SHOW. THE FACE OF A HARMLESS OLD MAN SEEMED ABOUT AS GOOD A MASK AS ANY, AND THE LEAST I COULD DO WAS HONOR CURTAIN BY WEARING HIS. I HAD, AFTER ALL, KILLED THE MAN.
HIM AND SO MANY OTHERS.
BUT NOT THE CHILDREN IN THE CITY HOSPITALS. AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO CLAIM CREDIT FOR THAT BIBLICAL FLOURISH, I MUST CONFESS I HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. YOU CAN BE SURE, THOUGH, THAT ONCE I CAUGHT WIND OF THE SHOCKING TRAGEDY, I WASTED NO TIME WORKING IT INTO MY LITTLE SCENARIO.
DAILY BUGL
NEW YORK'S FINEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
HOSPITA TRAGEDY
IT WAS A SERENDIPITOUS HAPPENSTANCE -- ONE THAT MUST HAVE THE GUILTY PARTY TWISTING IN SWEATY, INSOMNIA-PLAGUED SHEETS, NO DOUBT.
HELPING SEND YOUR FORMER LADY-LOVE TO THE GRAVE, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN NOTHING I'VE LOST SLEEP OVER.
IT'S AMAZING, ISN'T IT? A LIFETIME FULL OF QUESTIONABLE MORAL BEHAVIOR DID MORE TO CONVINCE HER THAT SHE WAS RIDDLED WITH DISEASE THAN ME IN MY RENTED DOCTOR SUIT.
MAYBE SHE WAS *HIV*-POSITIVE, MAYBE SHE WASN'T. YOU'D THINK SHE'D AT LEAST GET A SECOND OPINION.
"DIDN'T REALLY MATTER IN THE END, DID IT? THAT MANIAC I SENT IN TO TOY WITH YOU FURTHER SAW TO IT THAT THE NEXT DOCTOR SHE'D SEE...
"...WAS THE CORONER.

THEY ALL PLAYED THEIR PARTS WONDERFULLY, MY LITTLE THESPIANS.
THROW IN A FEW SPOOKY STORIES, SOME MAKEUP, AND A HALLUCINOGEN OR TWO...
...AND YOU'VE GOT THE GROTESQUE MORALITY PLAY THAT HAS BEEN YOUR LIFE FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS.
EXCUSE ME.
HOW ARE YOU FEELING, MISTER GABRIEL? IT SEEMS OUR FRIEND DEALT YOU QUITE THE BLOW DURING YOUR BATTLE, DIDN'T HE?
GOTTA... GOTTA GET TO THE HOSPITAL...
REST ASSURED, HELP IS ON THE WAY, MISTER GABRIEL.
Ah --
-- HERE IT IS NOW.
BRATAT
BRRATATATATA
NO!
THIS ISN'T AN AUDIENCE-PARTICIPATION PIECE, DAREDEVIL. I'D ADVISE YOU TO REMEMBER THE WELFARE OF THE CHILD.

BESIDES -- THESE MEN KNEW YOUR IDENTITY BEHIND THE MASK.
CAN'T HAVE YOUR FOES RUNNING AROUND ON THE STREETS KNOWING ALL YOUR SECRETS, NOW CAN WE?
THAT'S IT...
YOU WANNA KNOW ABOUT SECRETS?
WHILE YOU'VE BEEN RAMBLING ABOUT HOW CLEVER YOU ARE, I'VE BEEN LISTENING FOR THE HUM.
HUM? WHAT HUM?
THE HUM OF THE BATTERY THAT POWERS YOUR SUIT'S CIRCUITRY.
SHKRACK
AHHH!
KARASHH

FINALLY...
AFTER MORE LOSS THAN I'VE EVER KNOWN...
I SEE THE FACE OF MY TORMENTOR.
YOU BREAK IT, YOU BOUGHT IT.
TELL ME WHERE THE BABY IS NOW...
OR SO HELP ME GOD, I'LL *KILL YOU!*
AND H... HERE WE ARE...
THE... F... FINAL ACT. THE ONE I'VE B... BEEN P... PLOTTING FOR THE L... LAST YEAR...
I'VE D... DESTROYED ALL THAT YOU H... HOLD D... DEAR. I'VE SP... SPILLED INNOCENT B... BLOOD IN YOUR N... NAME...
D... DO IT, HERO...
K... KILL ME.

UNG!
I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU THE SATISFACTION.
YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK ME? YOU'RE A JOKE AND A FRAUD.
NOW GIVE ME THE BABY, AND LET'S *END* THIS.
A... FRAUD?! I'M... AN ARTIST! I N... NEARLY DROVE YOU... INSANE!
YOU DRUGGED ME AND KILLED PEOPLE. THERE'S NO TALENT IN THAT...
JUST SAVAGERY.
B... BUT... MY DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE...
...WAS NOTHING MORE THAN B-MOVIE MATERIAL. AN AMALGAM OF WHORISH, CLICHED DEVICES.

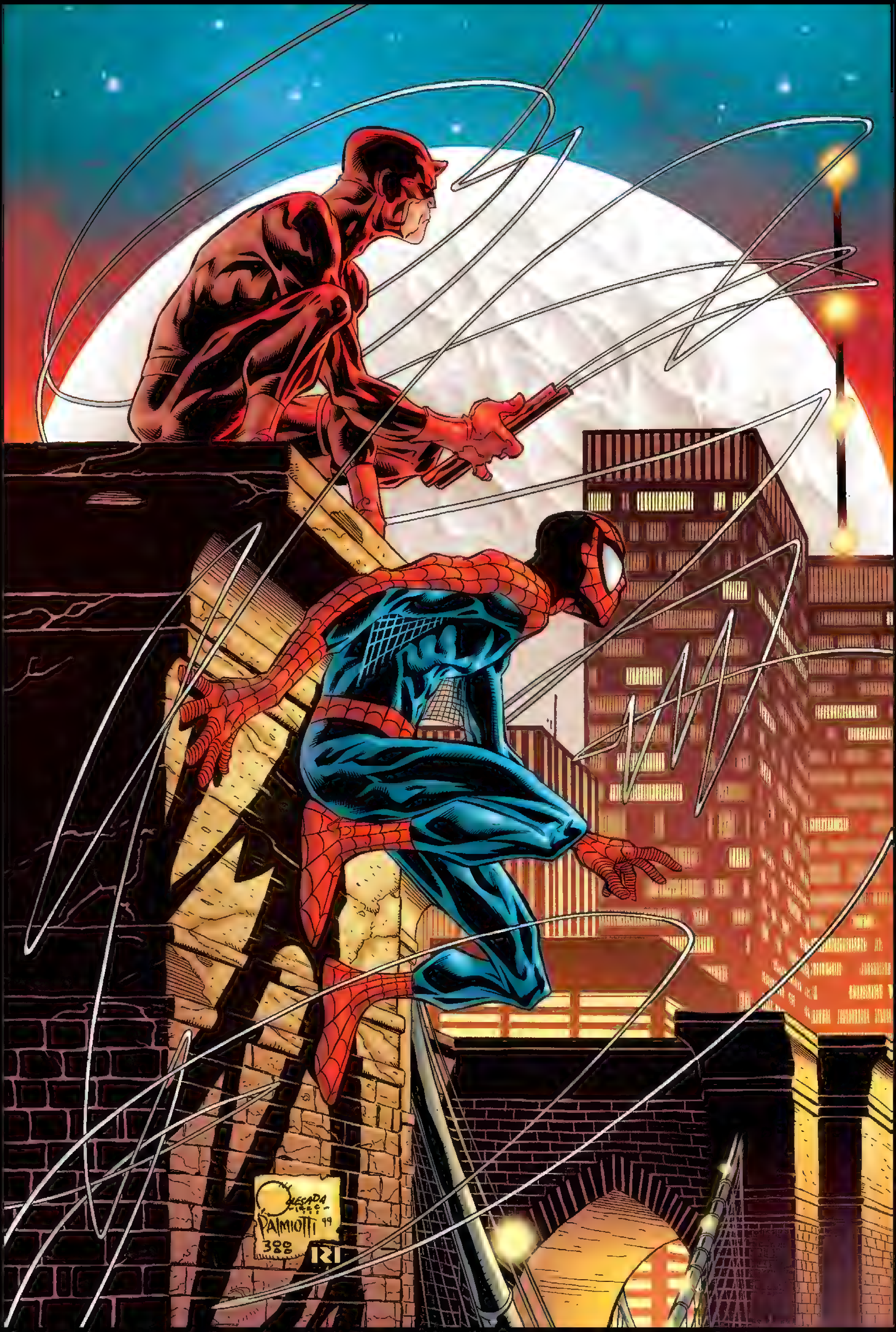
"THE SUPERNATURAL INTRUDING ON OUR WORLD?
"DIDN'T YOU USE THE SAME SHTICK ON J. JONAH JAMESON YEARS AGO?
"AND TRYING TO DRIVE ME INSANE? KINGPIN NEARLY DID IT ONCE.
"BUT YOU'RE NO KINGPIN.
"YOU'RE NOT EVEN CLOSE."
YOU THINK YOU'VE SPUN SOME SORT OF GRAND SWAN-SONG EPIC? THINK AGAIN.
YOU'VE JUST TOLD YET ANOTHER TALE OF A SO-CALLED SUPER-GENIUS ENDEAVORING TO DRIVE HIS ARCH-NEMESIS...
OR, IN THIS CASE, HIS *ADOPTED* ARCH-NEMESIS...
INSANE.
YOUR WHOLE EXISTENCE IS COUNTERFEIT. YOU'VE NEVER HAD AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT IN YOUR LIFE. YOU'RE A PRODUCT OF TOO MANY MOVIES AND TOO MUCH T.V. -- REGURGITATING ONLY WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.
YOU'RE A HUMAN XEROX, AT BEST.
I COULD'VE KILLED HIM.
BUT WITH ONLY A FEW, CAREFULLY CHOSEN WORDS...
I'VE TAKEN HIS LIFE.
I WATCH AS A MAN DIES BEFORE ME.
WHERE'S THE BABY?

TK
FFSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
UNG.
THE MOMENT THE GLASS LIFTS EVEN A CENTIMETER, I CAN HEAR ALL THE BABY'S INTERNALS.
TAK
HER HEART RATE'S NORMAL.
HER LUNGS ARE STILL FILLED WITH AIR.
BECK IS LUCKY.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WANT TO MISS THIS, DAREDEVIL...
I DON'T KNOW WHO'S GOING TO DERIVE MORE SATISFACTION OUT OF THIS -- ME OR YOU.
HIS HEART IS RACING, BUT I DON'T FLINCH.
I KNOW WHERE THAT BULLET'S HEADED.
WHY'S THAT?

BECAUSE I STOLE THIS ONE TOO...
FROM KRAVEN.
KABLAM
PAR FOR THE COURSE.
THE NOISE DIDN'T SCARE THE BABY IN THE LEAST. SHE DOESN'T SHED A SINGLE TEAR.

NEITHER DO I.

#8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RI

HE PLAGUED THE CITY FOR YEARS WITH HIS BIZARRE PENCHANT FOR THEATRICAL CRIMES. MANY DISMISSED HIM MERELY AS A "BUBBLE-HEADED" GRANDSTANDER. BUT TWO DAYS AGO, QUENTIN BECK -- THE MAN WHOSE NOM DE CRIME WAS MYSTERIO -- WAS FOUND DEAD OF AN APPARENT SUICIDE IN A BUILDING HE OWNED IN MIDTOWN.
I'M ALMOST READY, PETER.
DEATH OF A MASKED MAN
POLICE ALSO DISCOVERED THE BODIES OF AT LEAST TWO DOZEN COSTUMED MEN, ASSUMED TO BE IN THE EMPLOY OF THE SO-CALLED "SUPER-VILLAIN." THE D.A.'S OFFICE HAS YET TO MAKE A STATEMENT, PENDING FURTHER INVESTIGATION.
PETER?
TIGER?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
Hmm?
AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HE CALLED THIS MORNING, DAILY BUGLE EDITOR IN CHIEF J. JONAH JAMESON INDICATED THAT -- WHILE HE LACKED PROOF ON THE MATTER --
-- HE FELT THE VIGILANTE KNOWN AS SPIDER-MAN WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CARNAGE.
HE'S A MENACE! I'VE BEEN SAYING IT FOR YEARS, HAVEN'T I?! WHAT'S IT GOING TO TAKE TO GET THROUGH TO YOU PEOPLE?!
ARE YOU OKAY?
I GUESS. IT'S JUST...
MYSTERIO... HE...
I MEAN, AFTER ALL THIS TIME -- HE'S GONE. I'VE SPENT YEARS FIGHTING THE GUY, AND NOW HE'S DEAD. IT'S JUST...
I FEEL RESPONSIBLE, SOMEHOW.
PETER, THE MAN WAS A LUNATIC. YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT HE DID TO HIMSELF... OR ALL THOSE PEOPLE. HE DOESN'T DESERVE YOUR PITY.
IN A RELATED STORY, CHARGES AGAINST HIGH PROFILE LAWYER FRANKLIN NELSON IN THE MCKENZIE MURDER CASE HAVE BEEN DROPPED FOLLOWING THE DISCOVERY OF INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE AMONGST BECK'S FILES. MORE ON THAT AT THE TOP OF THE HOUR.
DON'T MOURN FOR MYSTERIO. MOURN FOR SOMEONE WHO DESERVES IT.
AND FINALLY TODAY, THE CITY LAYS TO REST ONE OF ITS OWN THIS MORNING...

STAN LEE PRESENTS
GUARDIAN DEVIL
PART EIGHT
THE DEVIL'S DELIVERANCE
KEVIN SMITH WRITER
JOE QUESADA ARTIST
JIMMY PALMIOTTI INKER
RICHARD ISANOVE COLORIST
RICHARD STARKINGS & COMICRAFT'S LIZ AGRAPHIOTIS LETTERING
NANCI DAKESIAN EDITOR
BOB HARRAS CHIEF
LET US PRAY.
LORD, WE GATHER TO LAY TO REST YOUR DAUGHTER, KAREN. WE ASK THAT YOU WELCOME HER INTO YOUR HEAVENLY KINGDOM, AND GIVE REPOSE TO HER SOUL. THROUGH CHRIST, OUR LORD. AMEN.
I'VE BEEN UP ALL NIGHT, TRYING TO WRITE A EULOGY.

BUT HOW CAN I POSSIBLY DO KAREN JUSTICE WITH A FEW PAGES OF SCRIBBLINGS CONCENED THROUGH A VEIL OF TEARS?
WHAT CAN I SAY TO THESE PEOPLE THAT COULD EVEN REMOTELY COMMUNICATE ALL THAT KAREN WAS AND HOW MUCH SHE MEANT TO ME?
I'VE ASKED MATTHEW MURDOCK, KAREN'S LONGTIME BOYFRIEND, TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE WOMAN WE ALL HELD SUCH A SPECIAL PLACE IN OUR HEARTS FOR.
MISTER MURDOCK?
IT'S VULGAR -- PLAYING THE ROLE OF THE HELPLESS BLIND MAN AT THE FUNERAL OF ONE OF THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO KNEW THE WHOLE TRUTH ABOUT ME.
I FEEL LIKE A LIAR.
HELLO.
THIS MAY TAKE AWHILE.
AHEM...
Um... KAREN WAS...

KAREN WAS...
NO...
THERE ARE NO WORDS.
I'LL MISS YOU.
THERE ARE NO WORDS.

AN HOUR LATER...
MISTER MURDOCK?
HELLO, PETER.
MATT... I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
I'M NOT GOING TO BE VERY GOOD COMPANY RIGHT NOW, PETER.
I UNDERSTAND.
BUT I THINK THERE ARE A FEW THINGS WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT.
YES. THERE ARE.
DOES TOMORROW NIGHT SOUND OKAY? HOW ABOUT THE USUAL PLACE? SAY -- NINE O'CLOCK?
I'LL TRY.
I GO HOME.
ONCE HER RADIO CAREER TOOK OFF, KAREN RETAINED THE UPPER WEST SIDE FIRM OF MOSIER, SCHWALBACH, AND PEREIRA TO HANDLE HER CONTRACTS.
SHE'D ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT USING ME AS HER LAWYER WOULD BE A LITTLE TOO CLOSE TO HOME FOR HER.
I JUST FOUND OUT WHY.
THERE WAS A SIZEABLE INSURANCE POLICY THROUGH THE STATION...
...FISK'S STATION, IRONICALLY ENOUGH...
...THAT SHE NEVER TOLD ME ABOUT. THE BENEFITS -- IF THEY COULD TRULY BE CALLED THAT -- ARE IN THE LOW SEVEN FIGURES.
IT DOES ME LITTLE GOOD, AS I CAN'T USE IT TO BUY HER LIFE BACK.
THEN, IN THE BOTTOM OF THE ENVELOPE, I FEEL SOMETHING ELSE.

SOMETHING THAT SMELLS LIKE KAREN.
Matt
Lover...
By the time you read this, I hope you're about seventy-five. Will you still be able to feel the raised ink through your aged fingertips, I wonder?
One of the benefits in the west coast WFSK package was an obscene life insurance policy. As you must know already, I've listed you as the beneficiary.
Whenever you get it, if you've ever loved me, I want you to promise that you'll spend the money on yourself. Don't give it to any charities; don't pay bills with it -- spend it on something that'll make you happy (but no girls, Murdock! I've still got my eye on you).
Consider it a bonus for everything I've ever put you through -- good and bad. Consider it a memorial for someone whose whole adult life was primarily a testimony to the power of the love of one good man. Consider it that last kiss I was never able to give you before I left for the west coast (in two days).
But mostly, consider it yours. Please Matt -- you've always done so much for me; let me do this one thing for you.
Of my death, however it came, I can say only this: it was a small price to pay for the gift of having known you.
Love Forever, Karen.
YOU ALWAYS LEAVE WINDOWS OPEN LIKE THAT?
DON'T YOU EVER KNOCK?
IT'S MY APARTMENT, LADY.
DO YOU EVER MISS THE OLD BROWNSTONE, MATT?
SURE. I'VE EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT REBUILDING IT, ONCE OR TWICE.
I MEAN, I *DO* STILL OWN THE LOT.
THEN WHY DON'T YOU DO IT?
YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT CONSTRUCTION GOES FOR IN THIS TOWN? AND REMEMBER -- I'M ONE OF THOSE IDEALISTIC LAWYERS WHO NEVER MAKES ANY MONEY.
START BILLING HOURLY AGAIN.
HEY -- YOU'RE PRETTY GOOD. WANT A SECRETARIAL POSITION IN MY OFFICE?
THE BENEFITS STINK, BUT I CAN GUARANTEE YOU A LOTTA AFTERNOON DELIGHT WITH THE BOSS.
BEEN THERE, DONE THAT.
CAN'T BLAME A GUY FOR TRYING. I'M GOING TO TAKE A SHOWER --
-- TRY TO GET THIS MUGGER SMELL OFF ME.

CARE FOR A LITTLE COMPANY, HERO?
ONLY IF IT'S YOU, BABE...
ONLY IF IT'S YOU.
RIKERS ISLAND PRISON BARGE, THE NEXT DAY...
HEY, FREE MAN.
HEY, MATT.
C'MON -- I'VE GOT A CAR WAITING.
WAS LIZ AT THE FUNERAL?
YES.
HAVE YOU SPOKEN TO HER YET?
ONCE. SHE CAME TO VISIT ME.

"I'D SPENT MY FIRST DAY IN RIKER'S GOING OVER AND OVER IN MY HEAD WHAT HAD HAPPENED WITH LYDIA.
"I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT IF MAYBE I REALLY DIDN'T SEE WHAT I THOUGHT I SAW. OR MAYBE IF I DID SEE SOMETHING, BUT IT WASN'T REAL.
"MY HEAD WAS SWIMMING. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED, I HADN'T SPOKEN TO YOU SINCE THE ARRAIGNMENT, MY MOTHER WASN'T COMING TO SEE ME, AND I WAS STARTING TO GET RECOGNIZED BY SOME OF THE OTHER INMATES -- GUYS WHOSE CASES WE'D TURNED DOWN IN THE PAST.
"I WAS REALLY SCARED.
"BUT NOT NEARLY AS SCARED...
"... AS WHEN I HAD TO FACE LIZ."
HELLO, FRANKLIN.
LIZ... OH LIZ, IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU.
IS IT TRUE?

LIZ! I DIDN'T KILL THAT WOMAN! YOU'VE GOTTA BELIEVE ME! SHE WAS SOME SORT OF... I DON'T KNOW... *DEMON!* SHE THREW HERSELF OUT THAT WINDOW! I *SWEAR!*
BUT YOU *DID* SPEND THE NIGHT WITH HER?
I THOUGHT SO.
"LIZ NEVER HAD A NORMAL LIFE, MATT. HER HUSBAND AND HER FATHER-IN-LAW...
"WELL -- YOU KNOW...
"BUT SHE USED TO TELL ME I REPRESENTED STABILITY FOR HER -- SOMEONE SHE COULD COUNT ON.
"AND I LET HER DOWN.
LIZ, I'M SO SORRY... PLEASE -- YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW SORRY I AM...!
"I COULDN'T HEAR HER CLEARLY THROUGH THE GLASS, BUT I KNOW WHAT SHE SAID."
TEARS AND SORROW -- WELCOME TO MY WORLD, FRANKLIN.
"AND THEN SHE WAS GONE."

IT DOESN'T MATTER THAT THEY CLEARED THE CHARGES, MATT...
BECAUSE THEY CAN'T ERASE THE REAL CRIME.
NEXT EXIT
THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE, LATER THAT NIGHT...
CARE FOR A LITTLE COMPANY?
NO OFFENSE, PETE -- BUT THE COMPANY I'D REALLY CARE FOR WON'T BE SHOWING UP TONIGHT.
OR EVER.
THAT'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
BUT FIRST, I NEED TO FILL IN THE BLANKS ON MYSTERIO.
I TELL HIM ABOUT HIS ONE-TIME FOE, AND ABOUT HOW HIS TERMINAL CONDITION PUSHED HIM OVER THE EDGE. ABOUT HOW HE CHOSE ME AND MY LIFE TO USE IN HIS SWAN SONG RAMPAGE. ABOUT HOW HE'S HIRED BULLSEYE...
I TELL HIM ABOUT THE BABY, AND ABOUT THE KINGPIN'S ROLE IN ALL OF THIS. AND ABOUT HOW MYSTERIO ULTIMATELY TOOK HIS OWN LIFE...
I TELL HIM THAT PART WITH AN ALMOST SHAMEFUL ENTHUSIASM.
AND WHEN I'M DONE, HE SAYS...
I'M SORRY, MATT.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH.

IT HAPPENED TO ME ONCE. IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO --
-- BUT NOT SO LONG AGO THAT I STILL DON'T THINK ABOUT IT EVERY TIME I'M TRADING PUNCHES WITH ONE OF THESE EGOTISTICAL MENTAL CASES.
THERE'S NOTHING WORSE THAN LOSING SOMEONE YOU LOVE TO THE JOB.
I'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE, TOO. BUT WHEN SOMEONE DIES AFTER LEADING A RECKLESS LIFE THAT INEVITABLY CATCHES UP WITH THEM...
YOU LEARN TO SLEEP AT NIGHT, I GUESS.
SOONER OR LATER.
YES, BUT KAREN WAS AN INNOCENT.
THE CONCLUSION I'VE COME TO AFTER YEARS SPENT DOING THIS IS THAT THERE ARE NO INNOCENTS. EVERYONE'S GUILTY. EVEN US.
ESPECIALLY US.
BECAUSE FOR ALL THE 'GOOD' THAT WE TRY TO DO, WE CAN'T DAMN THE TORRENT OF DEATH AND INJUSTICE THAT THREATENS TO DROWN US EVERYDAY. WE'RE GUILTY OF BEING BANDAGES ON LEPROSY, BUT STILL OUR HUBRIS WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THAT WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
WELL, WE DIDN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO QUENTIN BECK.
ALL THAT DEATH AND MADNESS HE CAUSED -- ALL IN THE NAME OF SELF-ESTEEM. THE GUY ENDED LIVES -- PROMISING OR OTHERWISE --
-- AND FOR WHAT? TO PROVE HE WASN'T AS BIG A LOSER AS HE FELT THE WORLD THOUGHT HE WAS?
WHAT A JOKE.
NO PETER -- THERE ARE NO INNOCENTS. EVEN IN THE STRICTEST OF DEFINITIONS, PEOPLE LIKE THE LOVED ONE YOU MENTIONED AND KAREN ARE STILL GUILTY.
THEY'RE GUILTY OF DYING, AND LEAVING US ALONE IN THIS MIRE OF SOLITUDE AND MISERY.

AND CAN YOU *BLAME* THEM? WHY SHOULD THEY HOLD ONTO LIFE? JUST TO BE WITH LIARS LIKE US? THAT'S WHAT WE ARE, REALLY -- LIARS. ALL WE OFFER IS FALSE HOPE.
WE TELL PEOPLE BY PUTTING ON THESE CLOTHES AND BEATING UP CHAIN SNATCHERS AND MUGGERS THAT *"IT'LL ALL BE OKAY. WE'RE HERE TO STOP THE MADNESS."* BUT WE'RE LYING, BECAUSE WE KNOW WE CAN'T STOP IT ALL; THERE'S TOO MUCH.
AND IN THE CASE OF SOMEONE LIKE KAREN, WE'VE DAMNED THEM SIMPLY BY THIRD PARTY ASSOCIATION. COSTUMED LUNATIC *'A'* HATES ME, SO IN AN EFFORT TO DESTROY ME, HE'LL KILL HERO FRIEND *'B'*.
IT'S *INSANITY*, MAN! AND WE'RE THE CRUCIAL COG IN THE DAMNATION MACHINE, PEOPLE LIKE US! BECAUSE NOTHING GOOD COMES OUT OF ANYTHING WE DO!
BECAUSE WITH BECK AND ALL OF HIS VICTIMS OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS DEAD AND BURIED, CAN YOU TELL ME ONE THING -- JUST ONE THING -- THAT MAKES ANY SENSE IN THAT MESS WHATSOEVER?!?
YOU *SAVED* THAT BABY GIRL'S LIFE, MATT.
THINK ABOUT IT.
GOTTA GO.
THWIP
SEE YOU AROUND CAMPUS.
THANKS, PETER.
I OWE YOU ONE.

1313 AVENUE B, APARTMENT 9B...
KNOCK KNOCK
TONY...?
YOU...!
WHOA!
BAP
WAIT... NATASHA...!
PSYCHOPATH! PERHAPS I SHOULD EXTEND YOU THE SAME COURTESY YOU SHOWED ME ON THE ROOF, YES?!
TALK FAST BEFORE I SEVER YOUR VOCAL CHORDS!
MUH... MYSTERIO...
THAT WAS YOU?
YES...
I'M SORRY. I HAVE SOME EXPLAINING TO DO.
I'D SAY YOU DO INDEED, COMRADE.
COME INTO MY PARLOR...

LATER...
YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE YOU WERE DRUGGED?
CAN YOU THINK OF ANY OTHER REASON I'D ATTACK YOU LIKE THAT?
ONE OR TWO.
I'LL ALLOW, MATTHEW, THAT PERHAPS WHATEVER TOXIN MYSTERIO POISONED YOUR LOGIC WITH EXACERBATED YOUR RAGE AGAINST ME. BUT I THINK THERE WAS SOMETHING THERE TO BEGIN WITH.
LIKE WHAT?
I THINK BENEATH YOUR NOBLE, QUIET EXTERIOR, LIES THE HEART OF A MAN WHO FEELS BETRAYED BY WOMEN.
THINK ABOUT IT: YOU WERE ABANDONED BY YOUR MOTHER AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE. AND THEN WHEN YOU GET INVOLVED WITH WOMEN, THEY SCAR YOU TERRIBLY. I KNOW I NEVER GOT SERIOUS ENOUGH FOR YOU. KAREN...
POOR KAREN...
SHE BROKE YOUR HEART TOO MANY TIMES TO NUMBER. GLORI TURNED TO YOUR BEST FRIEND FOR COMFORT DURING THAT FISK BUSINESS. THAT CRAZED HARLOT YOU CARRIED ON WITH -- THE ONE WITH THE PAINTED FACE...?
TYPHOID MARY.
YES -- SUCH AN UNFORTUNATE NAME.
AND THEN THERE'S THAT GREEK ASSASSIN...

YOUR ROMANTIC HISTORY LEAVES MUCH TO BE DESIRED, MATTHEW. THE WOMEN YOU'VE FALLEN IN WITH HAVEN'T NECESSARILY BEEN ANGELS, AND THAT'S BOUND TO HAVE AFFECTED YOU OVER THE YEARS.
IT HAS -- AMONGST OTHER THINGS -- MADE YOU VERY FRAGILE.
ARE YOU INSINUATING I'M A MISOGYNIST?
NO, LOVE. BUT I *DO* BELIEVE YOU SHOULD SPEND SOME TIME DOING A LITTLE SOUL-SEARCHING. TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL THINGS DISTAFF BEFORE YOU HEAD INTO ANY OTHER FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS.
WHICH, I REALIZE, IS THE LAST THING ON YOUR MIND RIGHT NOW.
YOU ARE ONE OF THE ONLY MEN TO EVER REALLY TOUCH ME, MATTHEW. I TELL YOU THESE THINGS NOT TO HURT YOU, BUT TO HELP YOU.
BECAUSE SOMEONE AS GOOD AS YOU SHOULDN'T BE ALONE.
YOU DESERVE TO BE LOVED AND CONTENT AND FULFILLED IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE, BECAUSE YOUR LIFE AS DAREDEVIL WILL NEVER OFFER YOU PURCHASE FROM THE STORM. YOU NEED A PLACE TO HANG YOUR HEART AT THE END OF THE DAY.
YOU NEED PEACE.
BUT IF I'VE EVER IMPARTED ANYTHING TO YOU, PLEASE LET IT BE THIS...
LOOK WITHIN YOURSELF FOR THAT PEACE BEFORE YOU LOOK FOR IT IN SOMEONE ELSE. BECAUSE YOU'LL ONLY BE SETTING THAT SOMEONE ELSE UP TO DISAPPOINT YOU.
GOT IT, RED?

GOT IT, RED.
BUT IF YOU EVER TRY TO CRIPPLE ME AGAIN...
...I'LL PUT THE BRIDGE OF YOUR NOSE INTO YOUR BRAIN.
YES, DEAR.
THIS USED TO BE MY HOME.
KINGPIN BLEW IT UP ONCE -- A LONG TIME AGO.
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I WANT TO THANK HIM.
HE'S GIVEN ME A CHANCE TO REBUILD...
WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN
J+A
J+N
K+J
VINCE
HAPPY BIRTHDAY Harley Quinn
PKJ
JAY + BOB
SmithwickP
Jim TORTOISE Richmond
el Franco
Gapet
ComicSmashR
Doc Peven WAS HERE
Steven WARBLE
Alitha
I GOT YOUR CALL. WHAT'S UP?
HAVE YOU SPOKEN WITH YOUR MOTHER YET?
SHE CALLED TO ASK ME BACK TO THE FIRM. YOU TOO. BUT I COULDN'T PICK UP THE PHONE. IM...
...I'M NOT SURE HOW I FEEL ABOUT HER RIGHT NOW.
WHY DO YOU ASK, ANYWAY?
YOU AND I ARE UNEMPLOYED -- SOMETHING WE NEVER HAVE TO BE AGAIN...
...IF WE WORK SOLELY FOR OURSELVES.
HERE?!
WHY NOT? THE LOT'S MINE.
AND I'VE RECENTLY COME INTO RAINY DAY MONEY THAT I PROMISED SOMEONE I'D PUT TO GOOD, SELFISH USE. SO WHADDYA SAY, FOG?
NELSON AND MURDOCK?
NELSON AND MURDOCK!

SAINT VINCENT'S HOSPITAL, THE NEXT MORNING...
CAN YOU FEEL THEM?
WITH YOUR HAND ON THE GLASS -- CAN YOU FEEL THEM THAT WAY?
YES. I FEEL THEM BREATHING. THE GLASS HEATS UP AND EXPANDS AS THEY EXHALE, AND YIELDS AS THEY INHALE.
I NEVER KNEW THAT.
IT'S SLIGHT, BUT WITH EVERY BREATH THEY TAKE, THEY AFFECT THE STRUCTURE OF THE ROOM.
I'M SURE THERE'S AN IRONIC OBSERVATION TO BE MADE HERE SOMEWHERE --
-- SOMETHING ABOUT HOW POWERFUL THE SEEMINGLY HELPLESS REALLY ARE, IN ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE WAYS.
I DON'T KNOW IF THOSE WAYS ARE NECESSARILY IMPERCEPTIBLE.
THAT SO-CALLED *"HELPLESS"* LITTLE BABE IN THERE BROUGHT A MOTHER AND SON TRULY TOGETHER, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER THIRTY YEARS.
LOOK AT HER -- AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO HER, SHE'S STILL ABLE TO SLEEP.
THAT'S ONE CENTERED INFANT.
ONE *CENTERING* INFANT, TOO.
DO YOU RESENT HER, MATTY?
THE BABY?
YES. FOR BEING AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED.
I THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A WHILE. WHEN I DROPPED HER OFF HERE AFTER MYSTERIO KILLED HIMSELF...
... I COULDN'T HELP THINKING THAT BECK PUT ME THROUGH ALL THAT PAIN, AND ALL THOSE PEOPLE HAD TO DIE...
... AND AT THE END OF IT ALL, THE BABY WAS NOTHING MORE THAN JUST A BABY.
AND I'M ASHAMED TO SAY THAT FOR A DAY OR TWO, I DID RESENT HER.
BUT THEN I TALKED TO A FRIEND, WHO HELPED PUT THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE. AND I REALIZED THAT THAT LITTLE GIRL...
WELL -- SHE *IS* A SAVIOR.
MATERNITY WARD
SHE'S *MY* SAVIOR.

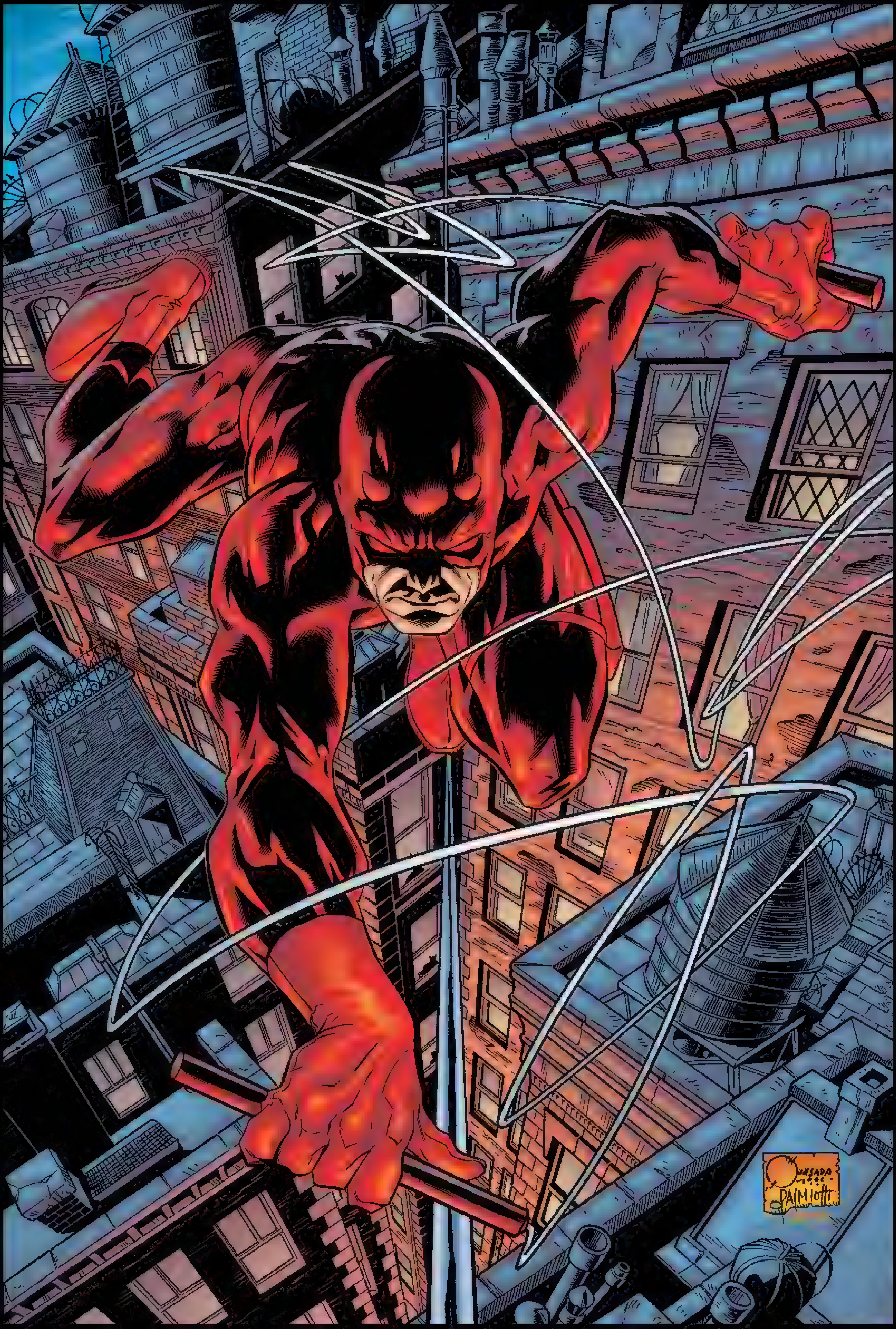
BECAUSE OF HER, I CAN SALVAGE SOME SANITY FROM THE MAELSTROM. WITHOUT HER, I'D HAVE LOST MORE THAN I DID OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS. I'D HAVE LOST MY MIND, MY SOUL...
MY FAITH.
NO, THAT LITTLE GIRL IS DEFINITELY MY SAVIOR. AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED, SHE REPRESENTED THE ONLY THING THAT STOOD BETWEEN ME AND THE ABYSS.
AND I'LL ALWAYS LOVE HER FOR THAT.
I'M PROUD OF YOU, MATTHEW.
YOU'RE A GOOD MAN.
HAS SHE FOUND SOME PARENTS YET?
ONCE THE STATE WAS ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT THERE WERE NO LIVING RELATIVES, IT TOOK LESS THAN A DAY TO FIND SUITABLE ADOPTIVE PARENTS. IT'S A YOUNG COUPLE IN NEW JERSEY, WHO'VE BEEN WAITING FOR A BABY FOR SOME TIME NOW.
THAT'S REALLY GREAT. MAYBE THEY'LL ALLOW A VISIT EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE FROM HER UNCLE MATT.
THEY *DO* WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE BABY'S NAME IS, THOUGH. DOES SHE HAVE ONE?
I WAS NEVER TOLD. I DON'T THINK HER MOTHER HAD THE CHANCE TO NAME HER.
THEN I GUESS WE CAN TELL THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS THAT THEY'RE FREE TO NAME HER WHAT THEY'D LIKE.
WELL...
MAYBE I SHOULD...
I MEAN...
DO YOU HAVE A NAME YOU'D LIKE TO GIVE HER YOURSELF, MATTHEW?
EXIT
KAREN.
HER NAME IS KAREN.
EXIT

THE KITCHEN HAS A SOUND TO IT ALL IT'S OWN -- A SOUND I LIKE TO THINK OF AS ITS HEARTBEAT.
I'VE FELT IT SINCE I WAS A CHILD -- EVEN BEFORE THE ACCIDENT. IT'S THE RHYTHM OF THE TRAINS UNDER THE ASPHALT, THE COLLECTIVE MURMUR OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD, THE HUM OF THE STREET LIGHTS -- EVEN DURING THE DAY.
BUT I'VE ALSO ALWAYS FELT ANOTHER PRESENCE ON THESE STREETS.
ERER BAKER
SOMETHING A LITTLE LESS EXPLICABLE.
POLICE
SOPHIE
EXPRESS DELIVERY
Maria's Beauty Salon
FORGIVE ME FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED.
Maria's Beauty Salon

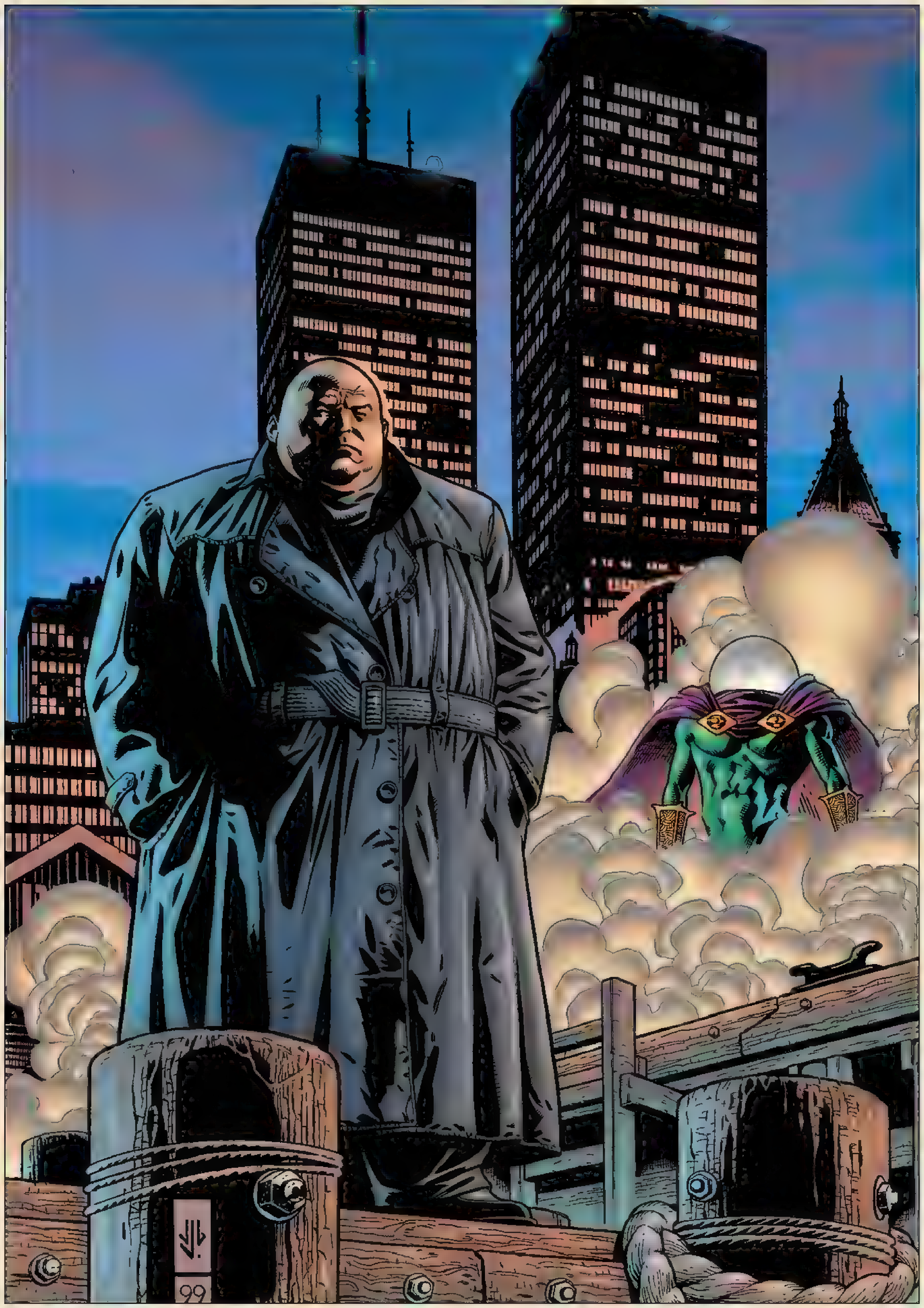
IT'S BEEN A MONTH OR SO SINCE MY LAST CONFESSION.
AND HOW DO YOU FEEL?
I FEEL...
I FEEL LIKE I'VE REMEMBERED SOMETHING I'D FORGOTTEN A LONG TIME AGO.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD THING.
NOW, WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A CONFESSION OF YOUR SINS?
FIRE...
DOWN THE BLOCK...
AND WHAT SOUNDS LIKE A CHILD, TRAPPED BY THE BLAZE!
MY SON?
SORRY FATHER...
NO REST FOR THE WICKED!
EXCUSE ME?
HEY! WHERE'D HE GO?!

TO DO MY FATHER'S WORK, PADRE...
TO DO MY FATHER'S WORK...

#1/2



On a mild winter night, in a nondescript harbor on New York's lower west side, atop a pier that had seen better days, two men met to discuss the fate of a third.



THE DEVIL DISCUSSED

"To know Daredevil is to know the man behind the mask," began the larger of the pair - a massive figure named Wilson Fisk, known in most circles as the one-time Kingpin of Crime. "And to know that man is to know the capability of the unbridled human will over the limitations of the human condition."

"Continue," uttered the more garishly clad of the pair - Mysterio, the costumed illusionist, known primarily for the opaque dome that hid his face and head. The synthetic smoke that emanated from hidden exhausts within his cape faded into the slight fog that rose off the dank Hudson River.

"Very well, then." Fisk cracked his neck slightly, going out of his way to not look upon his own reflection within the surface of Mysterio's helm. "The ten thousand dollar version of the life of the Man Without Fear."

"His name is Matthew Murdock," sighed the Kingpin, wincing as he compromised what he considered to be the most valuable, heretofore confidential information in his network of intelligence.

"He is the son of a pugilist."

"A boxer?"

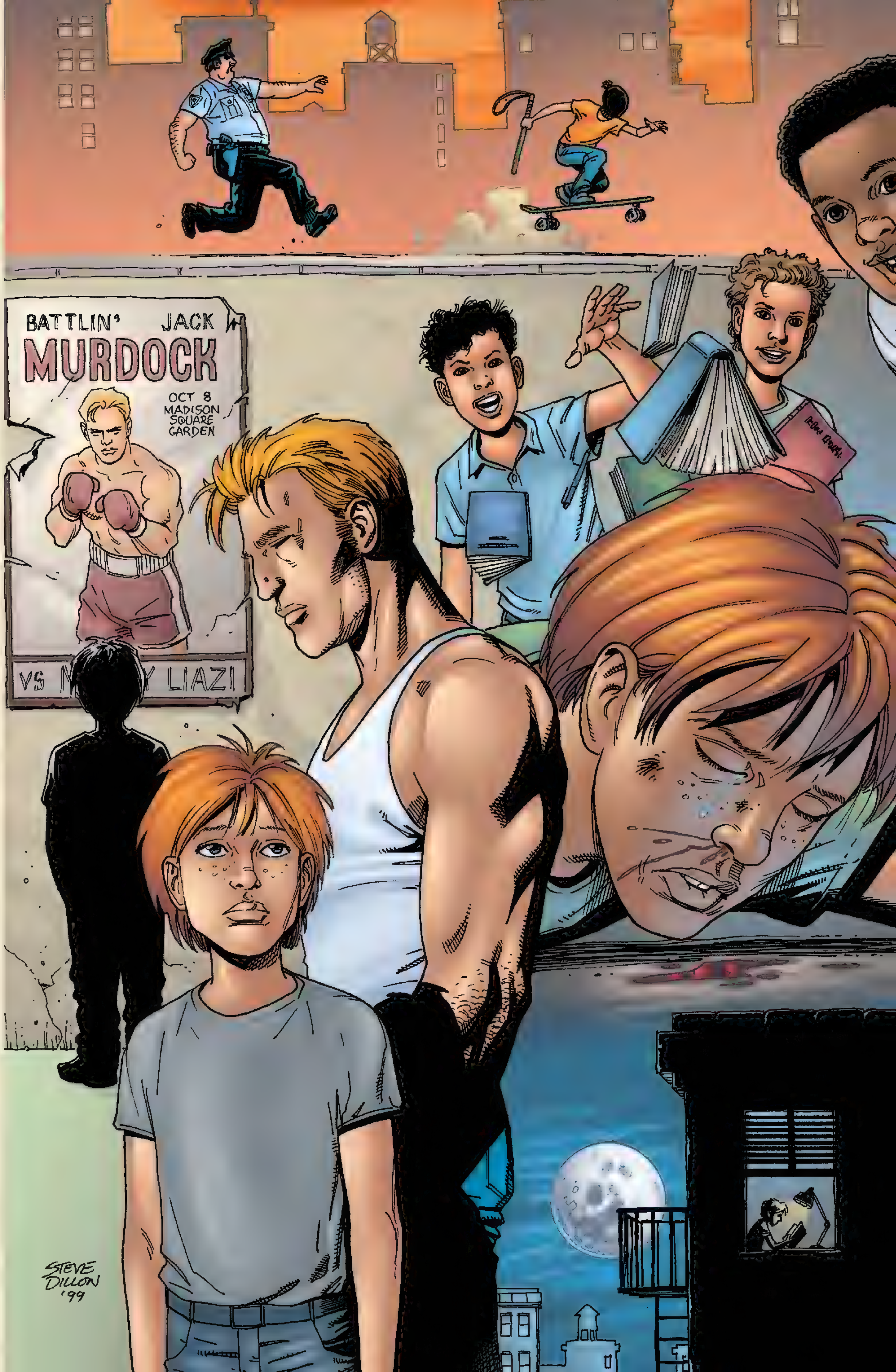
"Yes - a punch-drunk palooka, whose wife had abandoned the pair when Murdock himself was but an infant. John Murdock made what meager living he and his son were forced to sustain themselves on in the rings of the Hell's Kitchen ghetto where they resided, donning the title 'Battlin' Jack'."

"And he taught his son to fight as well?"

"Quite the contrary. He insisted his son devote himself wholly to an education that would one day rescue him from the New York slums. But young Matthew quickly learned that - in the vicious world of youth - brawn, not brains, rules the day. He was thrashed regularly by any bully with a crowd to impress, taunted with the moniker of 'Daredevil'. It is, presumably, the formative experience from which he drew the name of his alter ego."

"Presumably."

"So, like his father before him, Matt Murdock trained to fight - albeit secretly, so as not to raise his father's ire. He took to innocent mischief as well, offering the crime-fed constabulary of the Kitchen a run for their money."



But innocence is only sweetest when it's lost. And lose it Matt Murdock did in the following year.

"As fate would have it, the lad lived up to the name his enemies used to deride him, when an out-of-control truck carrying toxic waste found an elderly man in its path. With little thought for his own safety, the young Matt Murdock hurled himself at the senior citizen, knocking him out of harm's way.

"It is an act of heroism I often wonder if I would have been capable of - given the same events and circumstances.

"However, no good deed goes unrewarded. And for his act of selflessness, Matthew Murdock was offered a radioactive isotope to the eyes - one so powerful, it seared his ocular nerves, blinding him instantly, and forever."

"He's blind?!" Mysterio interrupted, incredulously.

"As justice," Kingpin countered, and then added, amusing himself, "Or rather, a bribed judge."

"Incredible. But his capabilities! I've fought the man myself!"

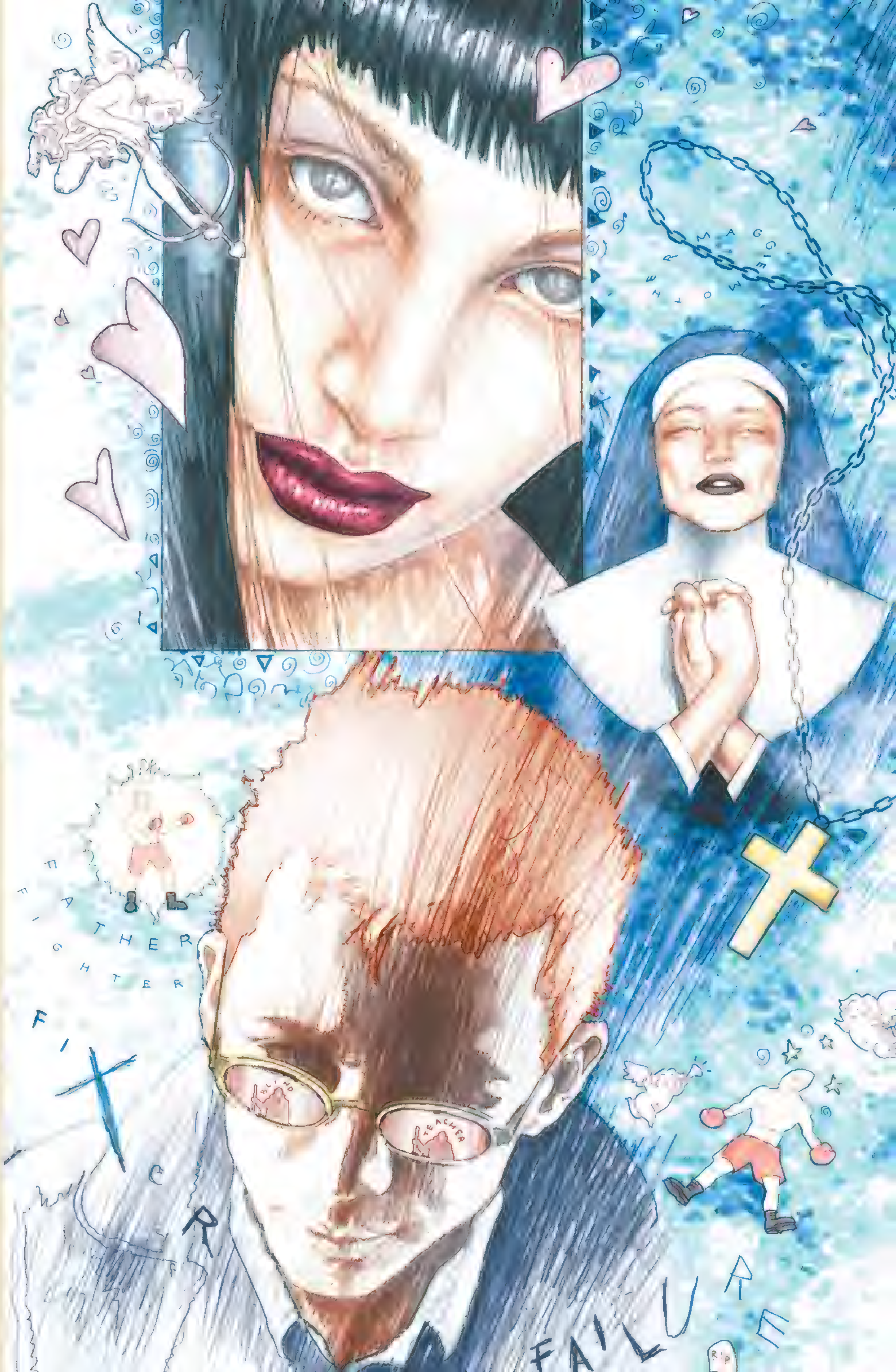
"The same isotope that robbed him of one sense heightened the four remaining. His aural sense is unnaturally acute, his olfactory sense rivals that of the oldest shark at sea, his tactile sense allows him to read the raised ink on newsprint. I don't know if the isotope affected his speech, but there are lowly thugs who've come and gone in my employ who insist he can belt out a sonar screech.

One, in particular - name of Turk - offered that little apocryphal nugget, though I'd wager Turk's powers of observation rely less on what he sees or hears and more on what will gain him employment.

"Training him to use his gifts was a nomad called Stick. We don't know much about him.

"But his newfound abilities weren't enough to save his doomed father. After reneging on an agreement to take a dive, the boxer was ordered assassinated by a low-level thug called the Fixer. The death of his father would help drive Murdock's irritatingly noble thirst for justice.

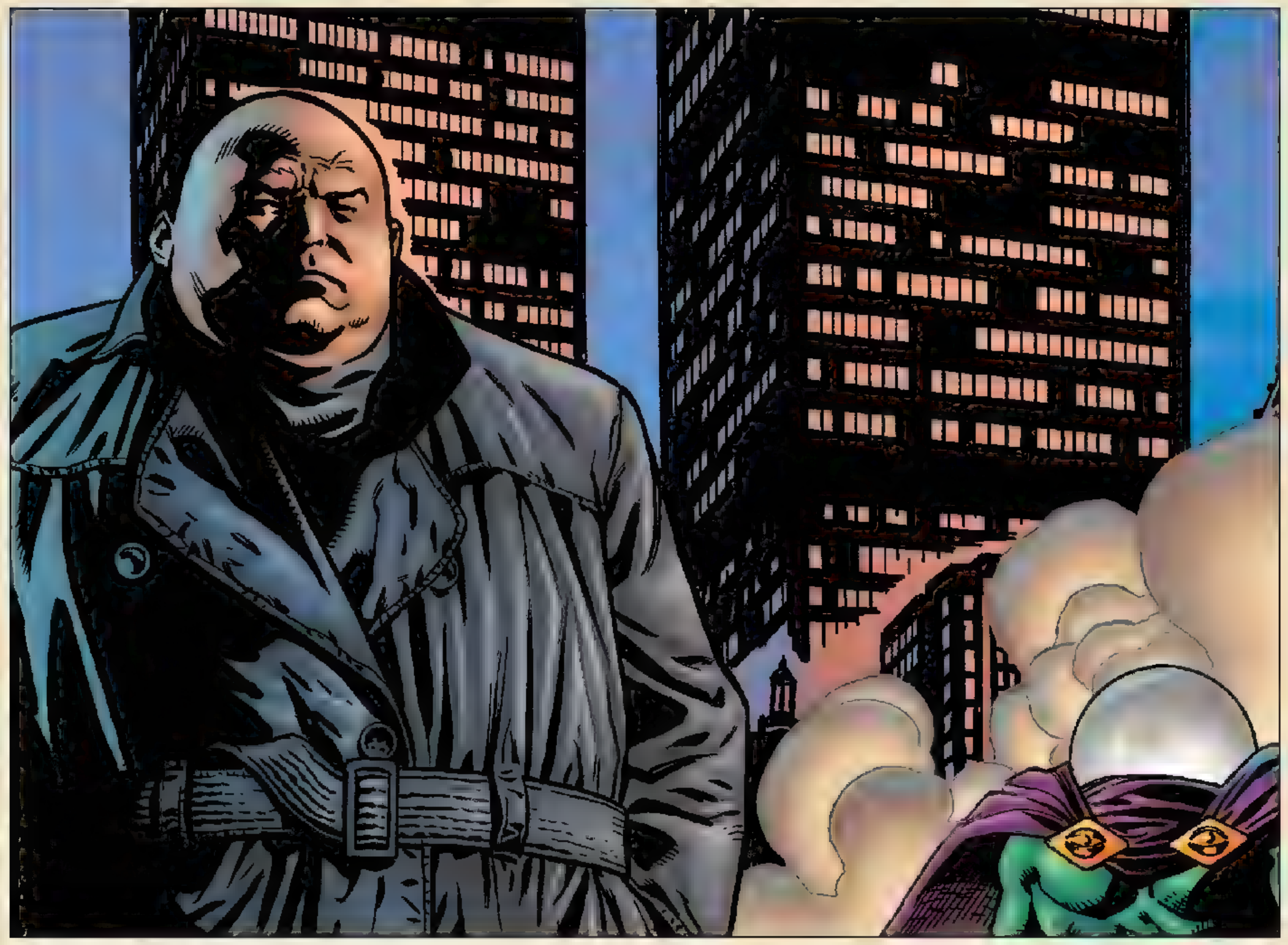
"And drive him it did - not just physically, but also academically. He enrolled at Columbia University, and excelled in his study of the law. But more than provide him the tools with which he'd eventually build his public persona as lawyer, college offered Matt Murdock two of the most predominant figures in his adult life: Franklin Nelson, who'd eventually become Murdock's flunky partner, and Elektra Natchios the Greek stunner who'd grow up to be a cunning, deadly assassin."

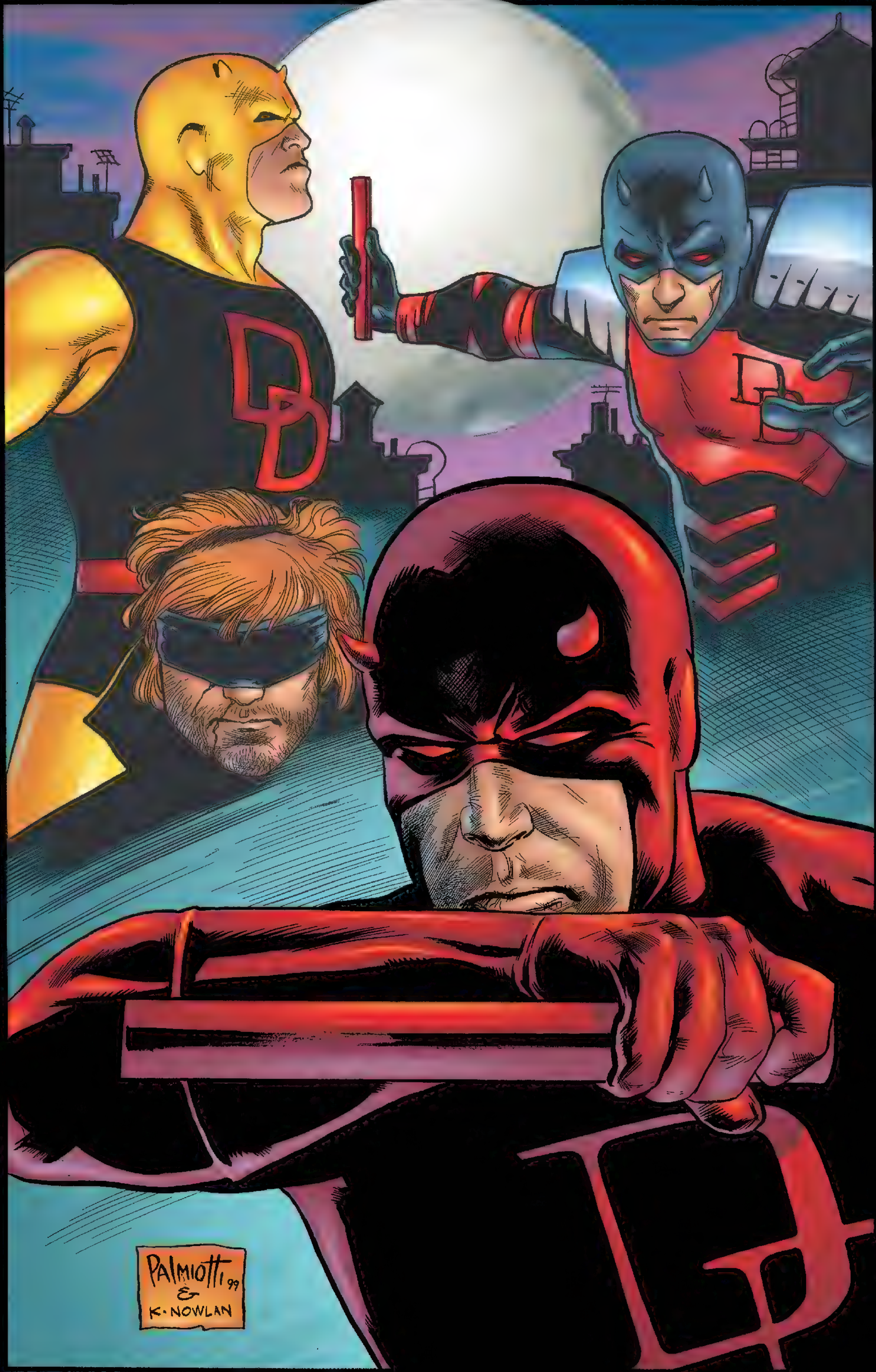


But that was years away. First and foremost for Matt Murdock was establishing an identity with which he could dispense vigilante justice outside his chosen profession. He settled on the unfortunate 'Daredevil', and the even more unfortunate yellow and red costume that dominated his early costumed career."

"I've seen photos of that outfit," shuddered the illusionist. "No style. No panache."

The Kingpin avoided the effortless setup afforded him by the figure in the green leotard, purple cape, and fishbowl helmet, and continued. "For most of his career, he wore the red suit that most are familiar with. There was a time when he adopted an armored gray outfit, radically different from his traditional togs. But - as with most costume changes within the tights-toting community - it didn't last."





And so it went, for many years - costumed vigilante by night,high-priced yet idealistic legal hotshot by day. Like a welcomed albatross around his neck, Murdock chose to partner up with Nelson - a man I found superfluous to the firm even though court and societal wags seem to differ in opinion. But it's Murdock's unflinching loyalty - not the fact that Nelson is aware of the dual identity - that keeps the pair together. Even years later, when Nelson's biological mother resurfaced and turned out to be fellow legal shark Rosalind Sharpe, the Nelson and Murdock partnership endured, simply being absorbed into Sharpe's own firm."

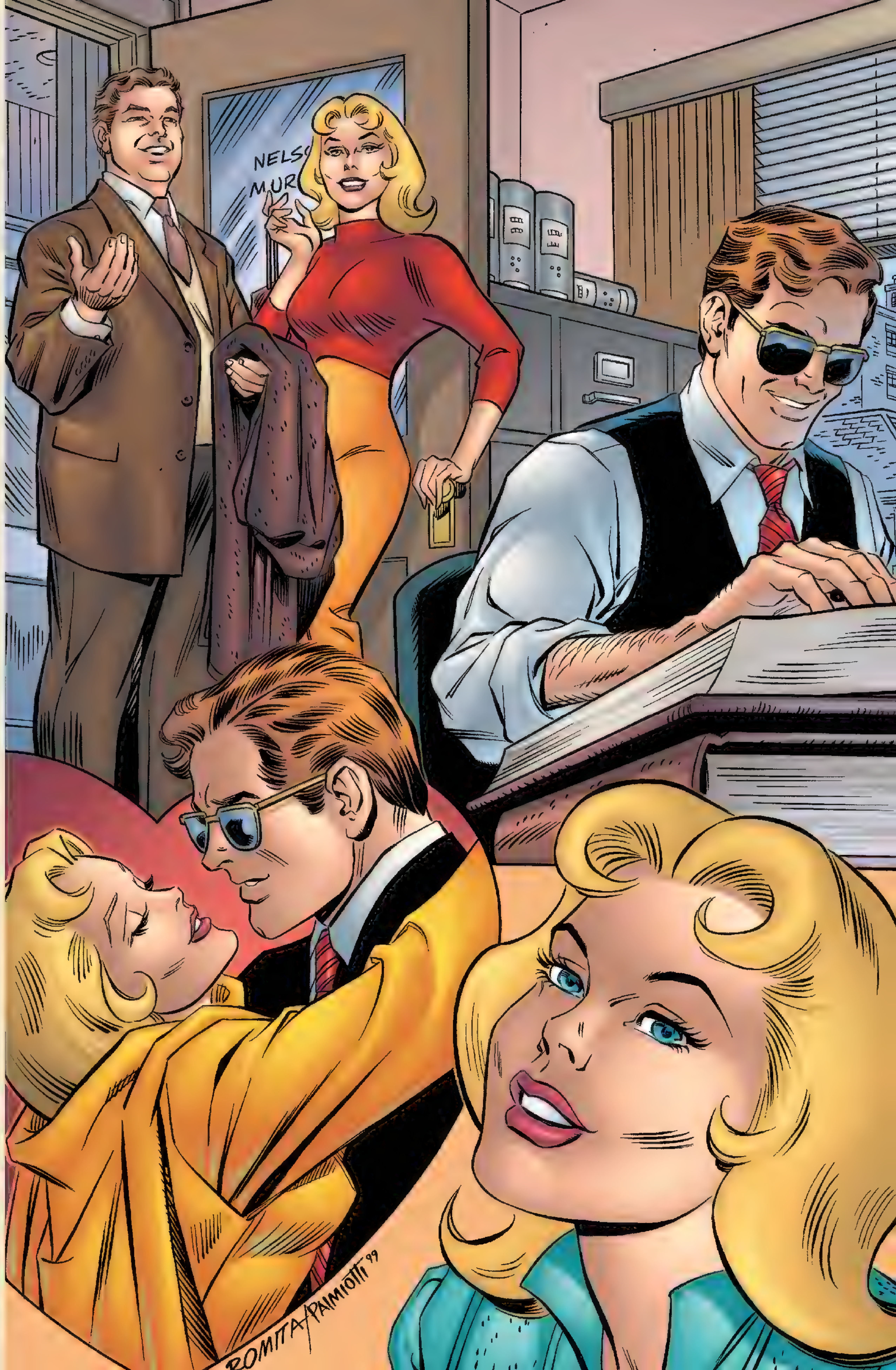
"Why do you think he allowed Nelson's name to go above his, if Murdock is the true draw of the firm? It's not even an alphabetical listing."

"Who knows why people invite or allow incongruity into their otherwise ordered microcosms? Perhaps on whimsy? Perhaps because life's too short to lose sleep over such trivialities as whose name belongs first on a door. But it was that quality, I believe, that also enabled Matt Murdock to cross that professional line and fall in love with his secretary - Karen Page."

"The radio personality?"

"And one-time adult film star. But we'll touch on that later.

"Yes - Murdock fell for Page, and vice versa. Theirs was a banal affair, that most make more out of in retrospect than in the moment. But they *did* love one another - such as it was. And it was a love that afforded Murdock purchase from the raging sea that was his life as Daredevil."



He has his own rogues' gallery, that - while not the most impressive - does merit respect within the criminal community. Anyone who can best Bullseye warrants caution. And while he's had to share a nemesis or two with other costumed adventurers, Daredevil's never been at a loss for those who would end him, if given half the chance.

"There was Stilt-Man, the Owl, Copperhead, The Gladiator - who actually reformed for a time and did costume work for his former foe. He's fought Mr. Hyde, and interestingly enough, also defended the beast as well - in court, as Murdock.

"There was the insane harpy Typhoid Mary, whom Daredevil would alternately sleep with and bring to justice - depending on his state of psychosis."

"Psychosis?" This intrigued Mysterio.

"One doesn't hurl themselves off roofs and put their lives at risk without being at least a little crazy - would you agree?"

"I suppose."

"Factor that to the tenth power, and that's Murdock. He's spent time on both sides of the couch, shall we say. May I continue?
Your time's growing short."

"Please."

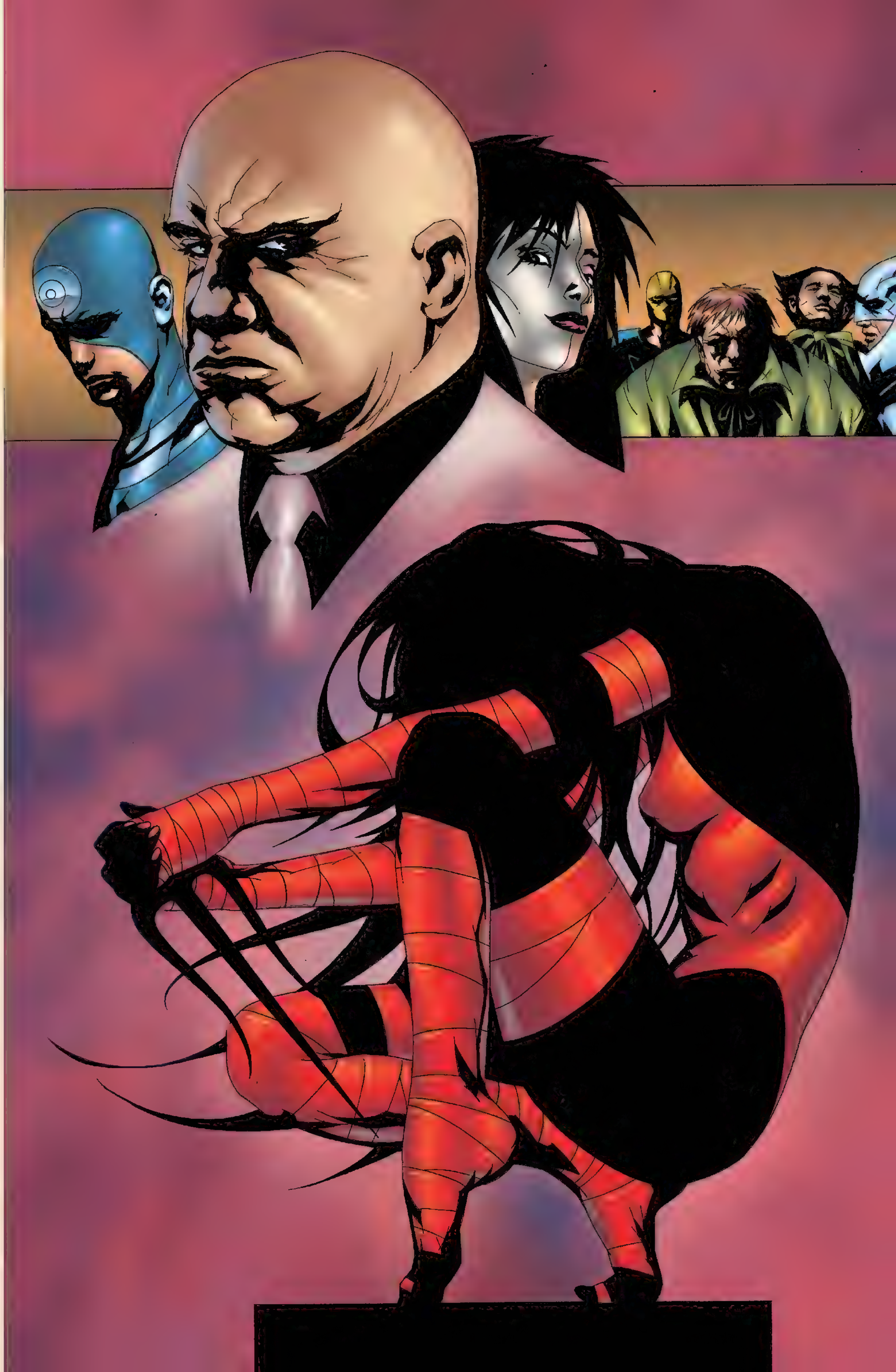
"Let's see - there was the aforementioned assassin, Elektra, his former lover. She surfaced in my employ and faced her onetime boyfriend once or twice.

"Then there was the other assassin, Bullseye, who would deal Daredevil the second most crushing blow of his career.

"I would later deal him the first, of course."

"And how did you do that, Wilson?"

"All things in due time, sir. Patience."



"You see, it was the culmination of his life's work that led him to be broken before me," Fisk reminisced. "Whether it was the affairs he shared with the one time Russian spy-turned-Avenger Natasha Romanov - more commonly known as the Black Widow - or his team-ups with our more predominant and celebrated mutual foe, Spider-Man..."

"Ah yes - the Arachnid...."

"...Murdock was sinking ever further into my machinations.
I thought for sure he'd snap when that lunatic Bullseye gutted his former paramour Elektra..."

"I'd heard he was responsible for that," Mysterio recalled.

"However, our boy Murdock proved sturdier than Gibraltar itself. I could never pinpoint exactly why he was so single-minded in his pursuit of justice - whether it was due to his Christian upbringing, or the dissolution of his family at such a young age."

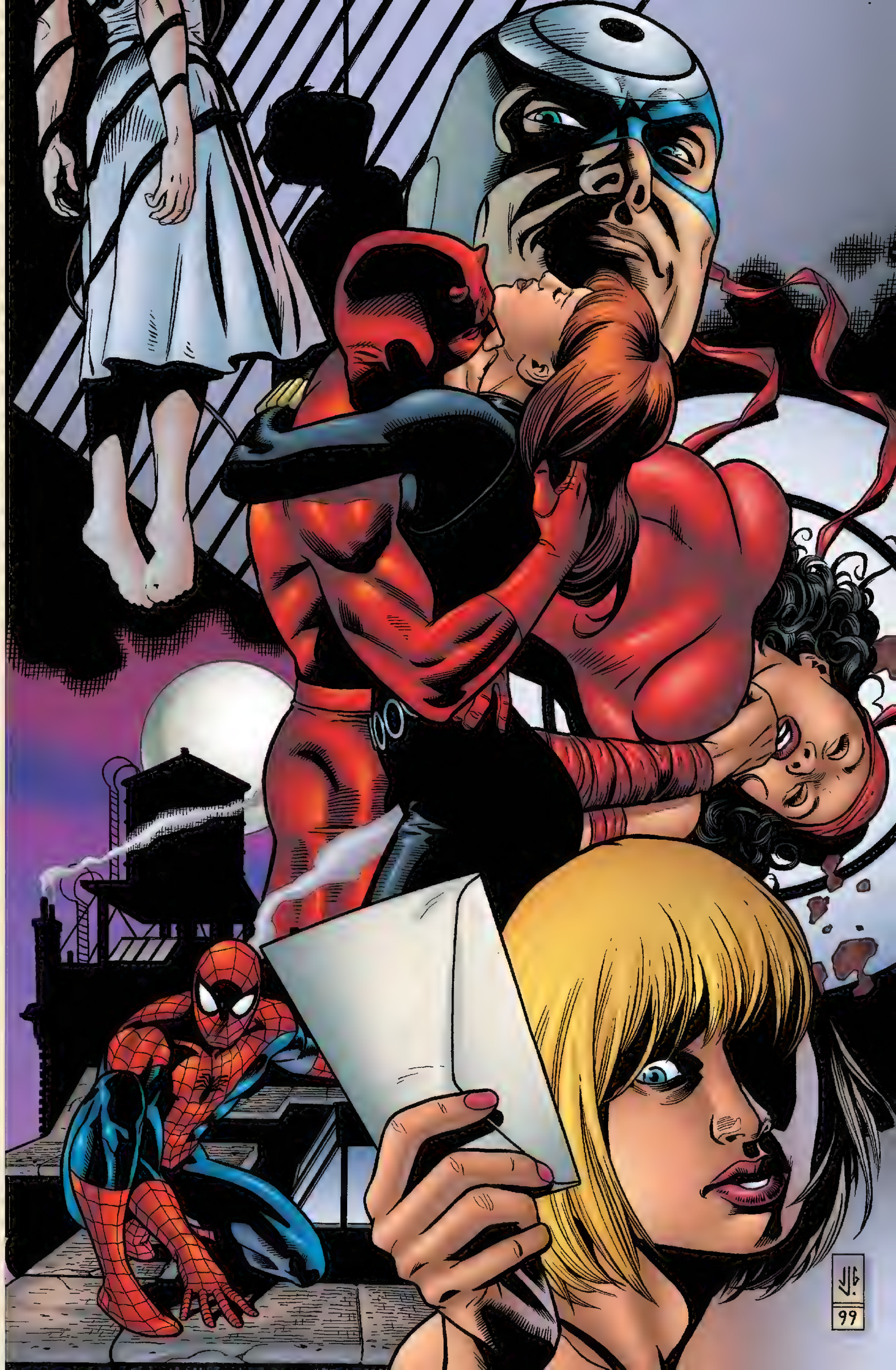
"You think his faith has much to do with who he is?" The notion began to take root in Mysterio's subconscious.

"Doesn't everyone's?" The Kingpin looked out over the Hudson and thought, as he often did, about God and his own conscience. "Religion is what keeps us going. And I'm not talking about the traditional definition of religion here - I'm talking about one's personal religion. Whether it be money and power, like my own, or what I can only imagine is yours - drama and greed. Our religion fuels us. Murdock's seems to be equal parts of that good, old-time religion that's slung at the faithful in the Sunday pews and the desire to right the wrongs visited upon him as a child. It's sad, really.

"But not nearly as sad as the religion that brought poor Karen Page to indignity, prostitution of self and soul, and betrayal of the only truly good man she'd ever known."

"And what religion was that?"

"The religion of heroin."



The junkie, Karen Page, provided the missing piece in the puzzle that vexed me for so long: how to rid myself of Daredevil.
In this instance, the junkie illuminated the sober by writing four words that would forever alter the terrain of crime and justice on the east coast, as well as the lives of all involved in what became a passion play of mixed results."

"And those four words were...?"

"'Matt Murdock is Daredevil'." Kingpin recalled it with the enthusiasm of a schoolchild who's deciphered a difficult equation on their own. "Suddenly, I knew that I could never destroy Daredevil. I wouldn't have to. All I had to do was dash Murdock on the rock of calculated misfortune and madness.

"And I did exactly that, deconstructing his life from the inside out, destroying all he knew to be safe and sane without ever leaving my inner sanctum, drawing him nearer and nearer, until - in the midst of his mania - he was able to discern that I was at the epicenter of his calamity."

"And did he exact revenge?"

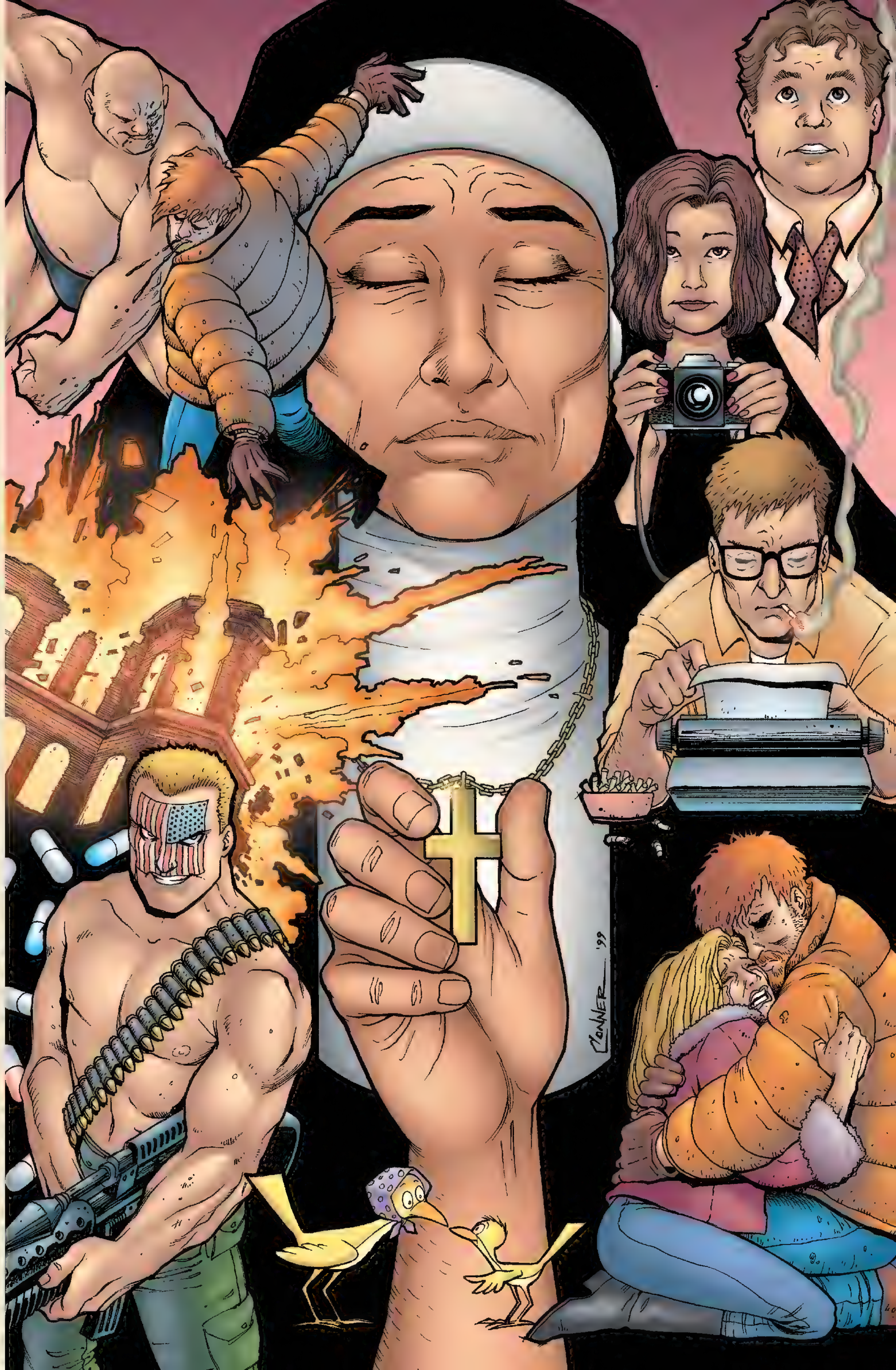
"He tried, then. He appeared before me and attempted to kill me. I thrashed him. I broke him. I beat him within an inch of his vitals.

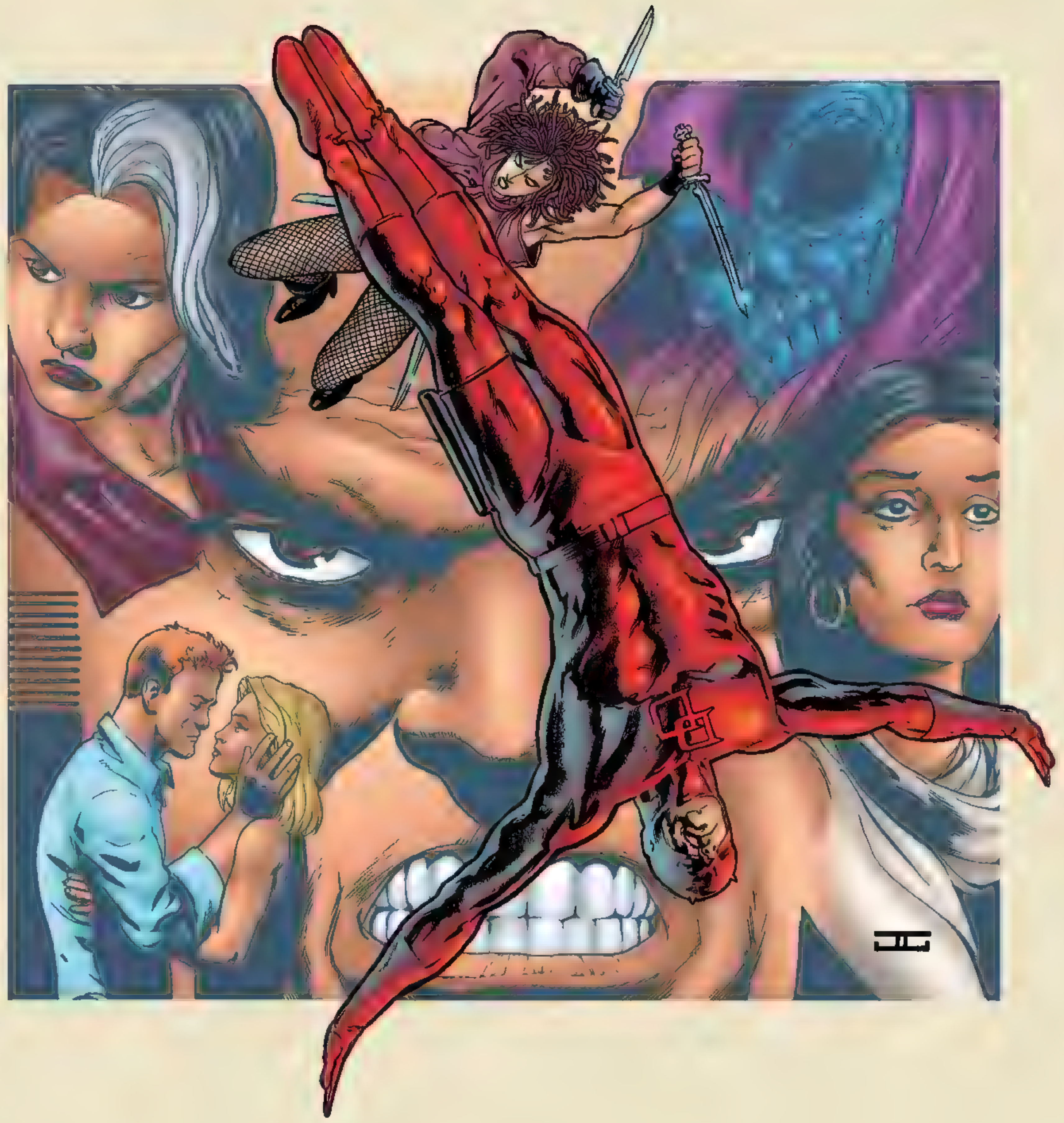
"It remains, perhaps, the greatest moment in my criminal career."

They fell into a momentary silence, Kingpin lost in a fond memory, with only the ebbing tide of the harbor and the low hum of the battery pack that powered the circuitry in Mysterio's costume permeating the quiet. Then...

"But he prevailed in the end, I take it."

No grand descriptions from Wilson Fisk now. Only a terse "Yes."





The rest is a matter of public record," Kingpin offered after a long moment (after all - he was being paid for his time). "He toppled my empire. He's fought Fear and Typhoid. He's moved his legal practice inside that of Sharpe's, as I mentioned before, and he's found love, renewed, in the arms of the woman who very nearly destroyed him."

"Turn the other cheek, the Christians say."

"That they do. And taking a page from their Good Book, I, too, shall be offering you my other cheek, as I bid you adieu and take my leave of you. I trust I've satisfied my end of the transaction?"

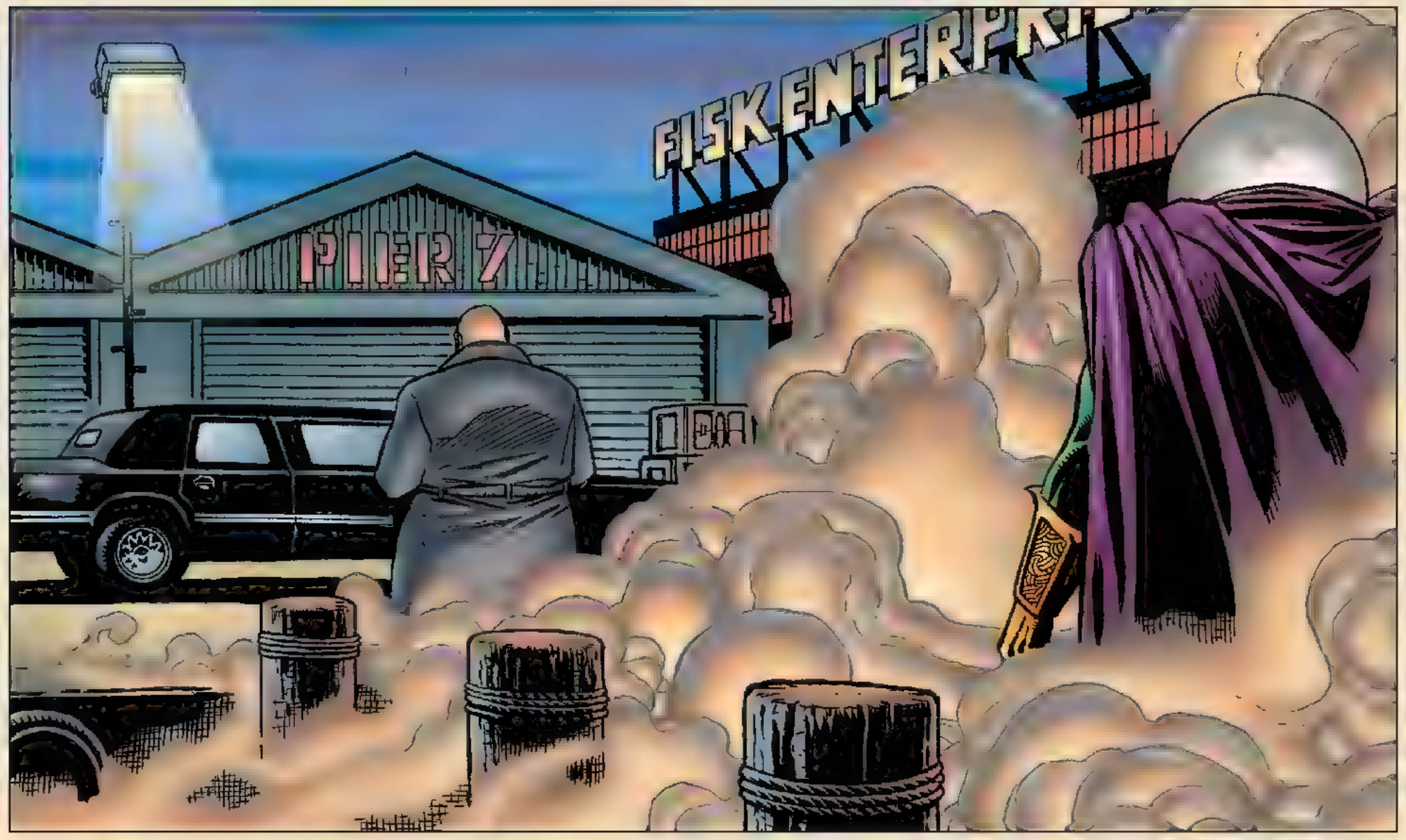
You have, Wilson. Your money waits in the trunk of your car." Mysterio ignited the jets that emitted his signature smoke. He couldn't resist adding "Don't spend it all in one place."

"If I was a betting man, " Fisk smiled, "I'd wager a bought precinct that you embarrass yourself with this 'campaign' of yours and receive the beating of your life from Daredevil in the process."

"The beating of my life," Mysterio chuckled, finding the humor in some private joke. "In losing, then, I'd win. Good night, Wilson."

With that, the Kingpin of Crime headed toward his waiting lift back to his broken empire, and the illusionist Mysterio disappeared into the man-made fog.

The Beginning..



Design by Jeffery R. Suter

AFTERWORD
by KEVIN SMITH

If you've gotten this far, then I guess I did my job.

Or rather, *we* did *our* jobs. Because, Lord knows, I didn't accomplish this on my own. I was backed by, partnered-with, and improved-upon by two gentlemen who are masters at their craft. Joe and Jimmy brought a dialogue-heavy story to life in such a visually articulate fashion that every finished issue I read made me question whether or not I'd really been involved. Believe me — I'm half-tempted to turn my screenplays over to Joe to direct, so impressed was I with his ability to make a page move when all it showcased was two people gabbing away. Someone should give this guy a megaphone and a budget, because he's a way better director than I am (I mean, have you seen my flicks? Let's face it - I'm a terrible visual stylist). And ol' inky Palmiotti traced like you wouldn't believe, adding linework that made the images leap off the page (or rooftops, as the case was). I can't wait to team up with these clowns again.

The unsung heroes: first and foremost, Nanci - who called often and much, first sweetly, then threateningly, to insure this book was as on schedule as it could be (which was sometimes a losing battle, I realize). She's the heart of Marvel Knights, folks. Give her a hand. The colorist, Avalon Studios and later Richard Isanove, did us all so proud. This was one of the most vibrant comics I've ever seen — due in large part to these folks and their palettes of many colors. The letterer, Richard Starkings, Liz Agraphiotis and Comicraft, who had the unenviable task of making four thousand words per page fit into what space Joe would leave for dialogue, after he was done drawing his pretty pictures. These cats are as important to me as the art team, considering so much of this story was presented in text. My hat's off to them.

To Jenny, my wife, who read every issue the moment I brought them home and said flattering things about each one. Love — your kudos will always mean the most to me. Thank you.

And the final thank-you goes to you, the audience, who plunked down your hard-earned cash to read about what we had in store for the Man Without Fear. When *Daredevil Vol. 1* was canceled, it was lying in anguish at the bottom of the top 100, if it was lucky. You folks consistently put *Vol. 2* in the top 10. Please continue to do so - as Daredevil is a character worthy of strong sales numbers and an even stronger readership.

A lot happened over the course of my tenure on this title. I started and finished my fourth film (*Dogma*), I started work on an animated series (*Clerks - The Animated Series*), I got married, and I had a baby - a girl, no less (and no - she's not named 'Karen'; we named her Harley Quinn, after a character found in the titles of our 'Distinguished Competitor'; man - I *always* wanted to use that term). But the most important thing that happened over the course of my tenure on this title?

I finally got to join the fraternity of super hero comic writers.

Thanks, all, for giving me that shot.

INTRODUCTION TO DAREDEVIL VISIONARIES KEVIN SMITH TPB
by BEN AFFLECK

Matt Murdock lost Elektra to Bullseye when I was just twelve years old. That saga (now known famously to those in the comics world as the "Frank Miller Daredevils") touched and moved me in ways I was then and still now am reluctant to admit, even to myself. I was fascinated by this man, this red-suited saint, who always seemed to end up a martyr. I read and re-read the panels where Elektra staggered down the street, wounded by her own weapons at Bullseye's hand, and died in Murdock's arms. I still remember the panel where, hanging from a clothesline (nearly in silhouette), Daredevil let Bullseye drop. For the first time, a hero didn't 'save' somebody. He actually let Bullseye die (or get paralyzed, later to be rebuilt with adamantium-laced bones — but you catch my drift). It was my own personal induction into the world of personal ambiguity. It was a dark corner, a place where my sympathies were uncertain. (Am I the only guy who occasionally rooted for Bullseye?) It was a strange and wonderful place where true love was always tragic, heroes had a dark side, villains were roguishly likable and the best one could hope for was some sliver of redemption.

You can imagine my reaction then when my friend told me he was 'writing' for *Daredevil*. Though I'd played a graphic artist in *"Chasing Amy,"* I still labored under my childhood illusion that while 'comic books' might have writers and inkers and pencilers and troop out the same heroes and villains and retread storylines ... *Daredevil* was different. *Daredevil* wasn't "written," it was birthed. It emerged from the deepest recesses of a tortured imagination, whereupon it was penciled and inked all at once. *Daredevil* wasn't "written," it just materialized on the page. And it was truth, not fiction. Matt Murdock was a real guy. You just didn't hear about him much in the papers. He kept a low profile.

Now my myths are shattered. Not only is *Daredevil* written, but it's written by *my friend*. The tortured, Proustian soul who gave the world retail magnates obsessed with hermaphrodite porn and the epic American Saga: *Mallrats*. Now I must live forever with the knowledge that he is the man behind the *Daredevil* curtain. So falls my childhood illusion. First it was Santa Claus, last year the Easter Bunny and now, the horned one himself.

To his fans, it will come as no surprise that Kevin Smith has written a comic book. What will surprise all but those of us who know him well is that, in this adolescent, bastard medium, Kevin has given us his most adult and sophisticated work. Most unbelievers think of comic books as chiefly an exercise in adolescent fantasy — kid's stuff, to put it bluntly — and that is a shame. After reading the following collected stories, I know that anyone (regular purveyor of the 'graphic novel' or greenhorn indie-movie fanatic lured in by the hopes of more Kevin Smith lesbian love triangulation) will find themselves hoping that we have not seen the last of Kevin's involvement with Daredevil. Because that ... would be a real shame.

DAREDEVIL Motion Picture and Images from Motion Picture © 2004 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and Regency Entertainment (USA), Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION TO DAREDEVIL VOL. 1 HC KEVIN SMITH TPB

by TOM SULLIVAN

#1
VARIANT

I was in trouble again. This time, it was because I had tied sheets together and escaped from my dormitory room at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. The staff caught up to me just after I had scaled the fence and tasted freedom for maybe ten minutes.

Why was I trying to escape a place so full of love and education? Because I wanted to be like other children who could see. I was searching to find my place in the world, and my role models were as juxtaposed as they could be. And yet, on second thought, maybe not. Helen Keller had broken all the stereotypes surrounding what it was to be blind or deaf, and I viewed her accomplishments as the models for my future.

Ah, but there was another force working to enhance my psychological development. This character lived life at risk. He stepped outside the system and defined his own sense of justice. He explored the unlimited capacity of human beings to utilize their senses—and while defying the forces of evil, he fell in love with beautiful women.

Now that was the ticket for hormone-raging teenage blind guy Tom Sullivan! When I read my first *Daredevil* in the mid-60s, I decided Matt Murdock represented everything I thought I could be. First— and my mother loved this— he was educated, cultured, a lawyer succeeding in the sighted world. And then he was Daredevil, able to kick butt using the same sensory skills I was working to have at my disposal.

There really is a thing called shadow vision. Blind people call it facial vision. When a person moves through space, they create a rush of air, and that vibration pulses off the muscles of the face, much like a speaker impacted by sound waves. When this occurs, a sensitized blind person can read the sizes of objects and their locations as he moves. Also, a turned-on blind person can echo-locate by emitting a clicking sound much like a dolphin. Remember Flipper on the TV series?

Then there's voice imprinting. There is no nuance that a blind person does not pick up on when it comes to evaluating where a person is coming from. Frankly, I believe my recognition of a person's true motives is better than any lie detector. In a conversation, I can hear a human being fidget; I can smell the toxins they excrete if they're nervous. I can sense whether they're making eye contact with me. I read the nuance of first encounters—a handshake or a hug. What's the body language? What's the intent?

None of this hypersensory capacity would have developed if I had not read about Matt Murdock. Because in the 60s, no one was teaching these skills, and no one believed a blind person could test their limits in sports, adventure, academics and relationships. Because of Matt's fighting skills, I worked to be a high-school wrestler and went on to become a member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, winning championships around the world.

Today I ski, run marathons and triathlons, love golf, and have even challenged my own courage by bungee-jumping from a few hundred feet. I've done a number of my own stunts in movies and TV series, and travel all over the world independently with the help of a beautiful German Shepherd guide dog.

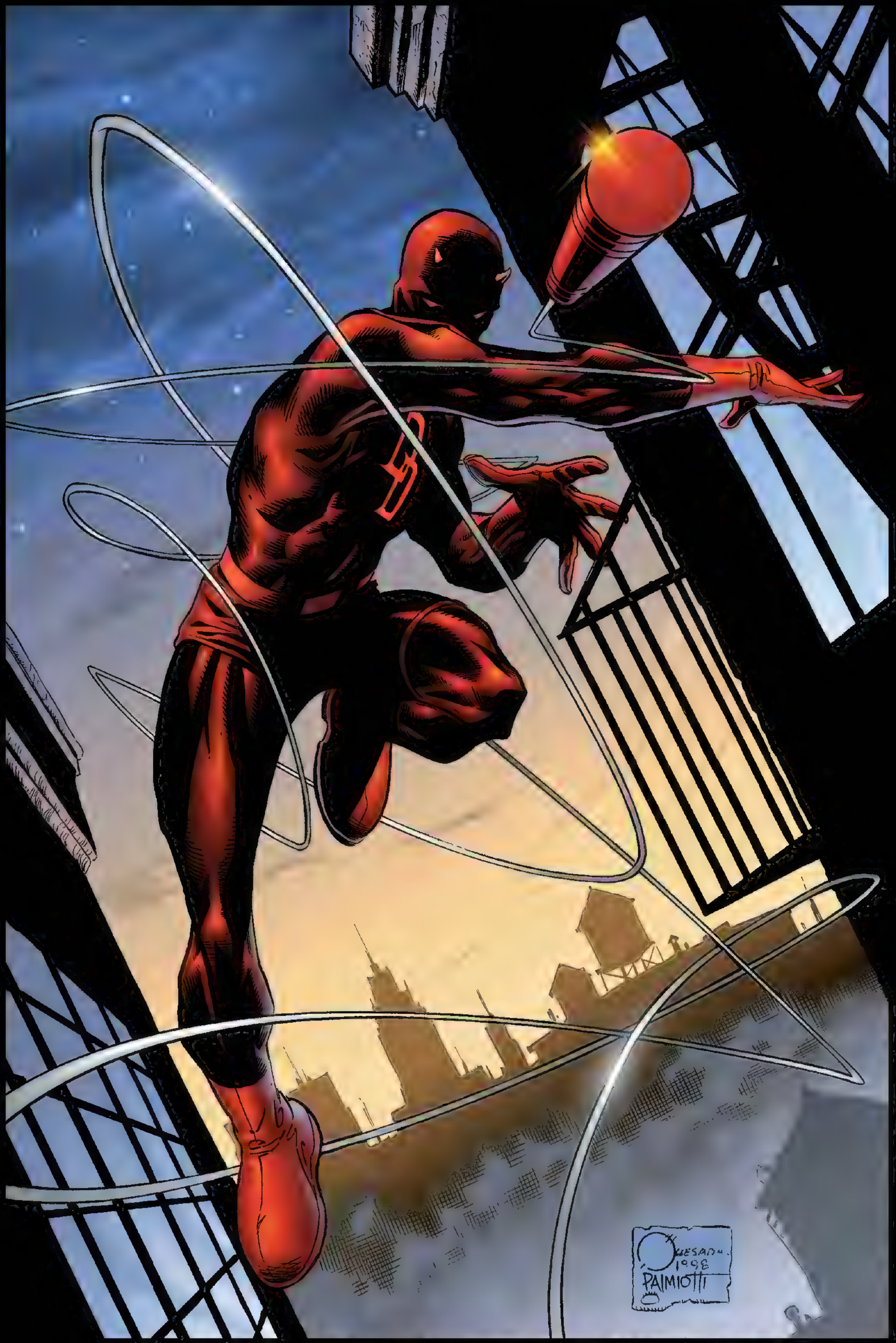
Now let's be fair: A whole lot of people have helped me achieve a wonderful life. But Ms. Keller and Matt Murdock clearly were my role models. And Matt taught me something else. He made me believe that there are absolutes in life—right and wrong can be clearly defined. And also, because of his relationships with marvelous women like Elektra and Echo, I came to understand that beauty is best seen inside out. The packaging is great, but Matt has always searched for the person within.

So here are two fundamental truths I came to understand as I read early issues of *Daredevil*. First, I could develop the capacity to turn all disadvantages into advantages. I could find my ability and overcome any disability presented. And I could also come to understand a fundamental principle that has dominated my thinking over the last 40 years. The truth is, I have never met an ugly person—unless they wanted to be, unless they presented me with a character consumed by their own ugliness.

The world is a grand place, experienced from Matt Murdock's rooftop. It's out there for all of us to love and appreciate, if we are simply willing to be daredevils on the high wire of life.

Tom Sullivan

Tom Sullivan's accomplishments as a writer, singer, actor, producer and athlete are impressive by any standards. That's the only way he'll have it. He has guest-starred on television's *M*A*S*H**, *Designing Women* and *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and has been nominated for an Emmy Award twice. *If You Could See What I Hear*, his autobiography, was developed into a feature film in 1983. His recent credits include working as a consultant to *Daredevil* director/screenwriter Mark Steven Johnson and actor Ben Affleck, and the feature film, *Going to the Mat*.



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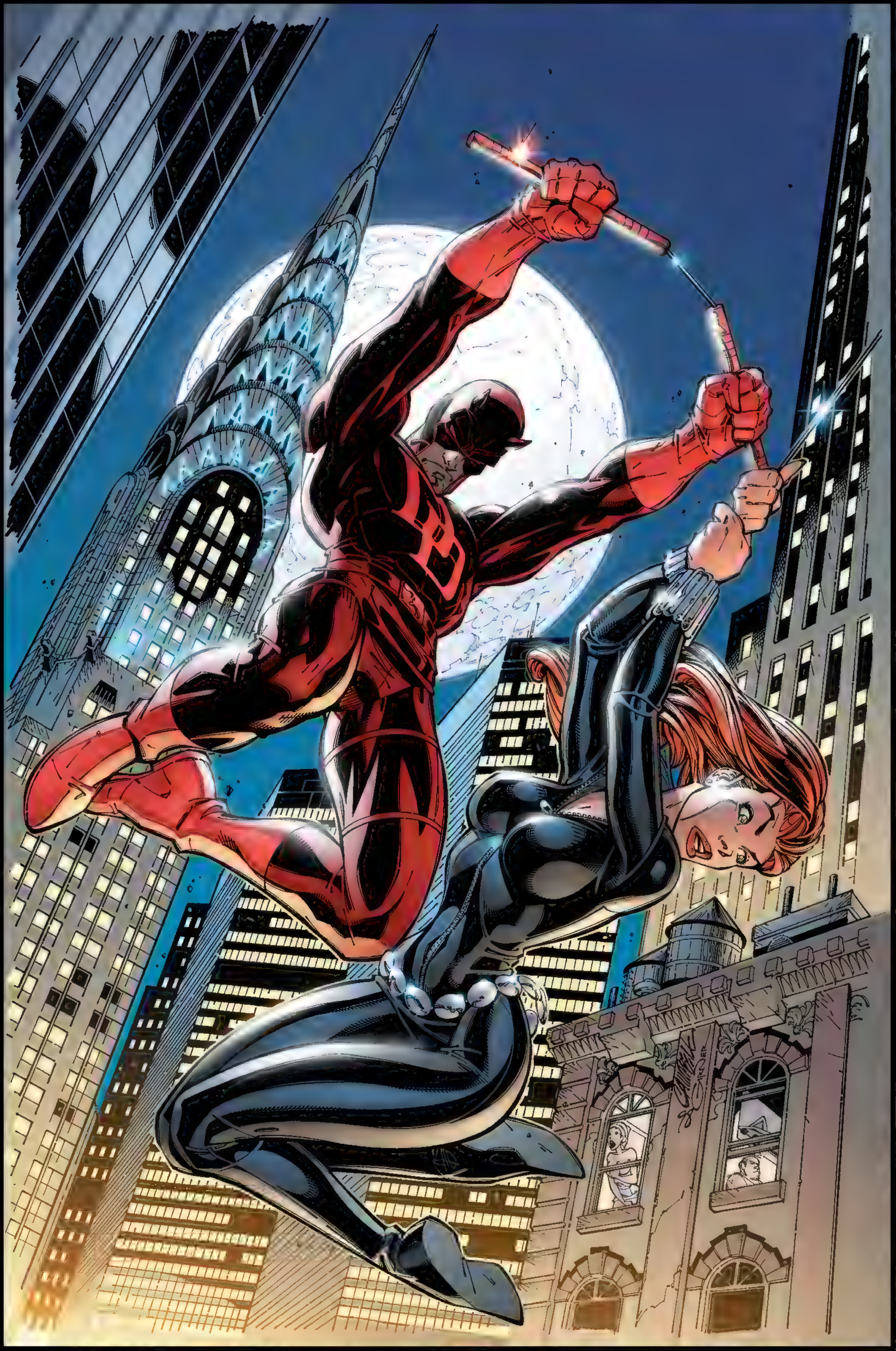

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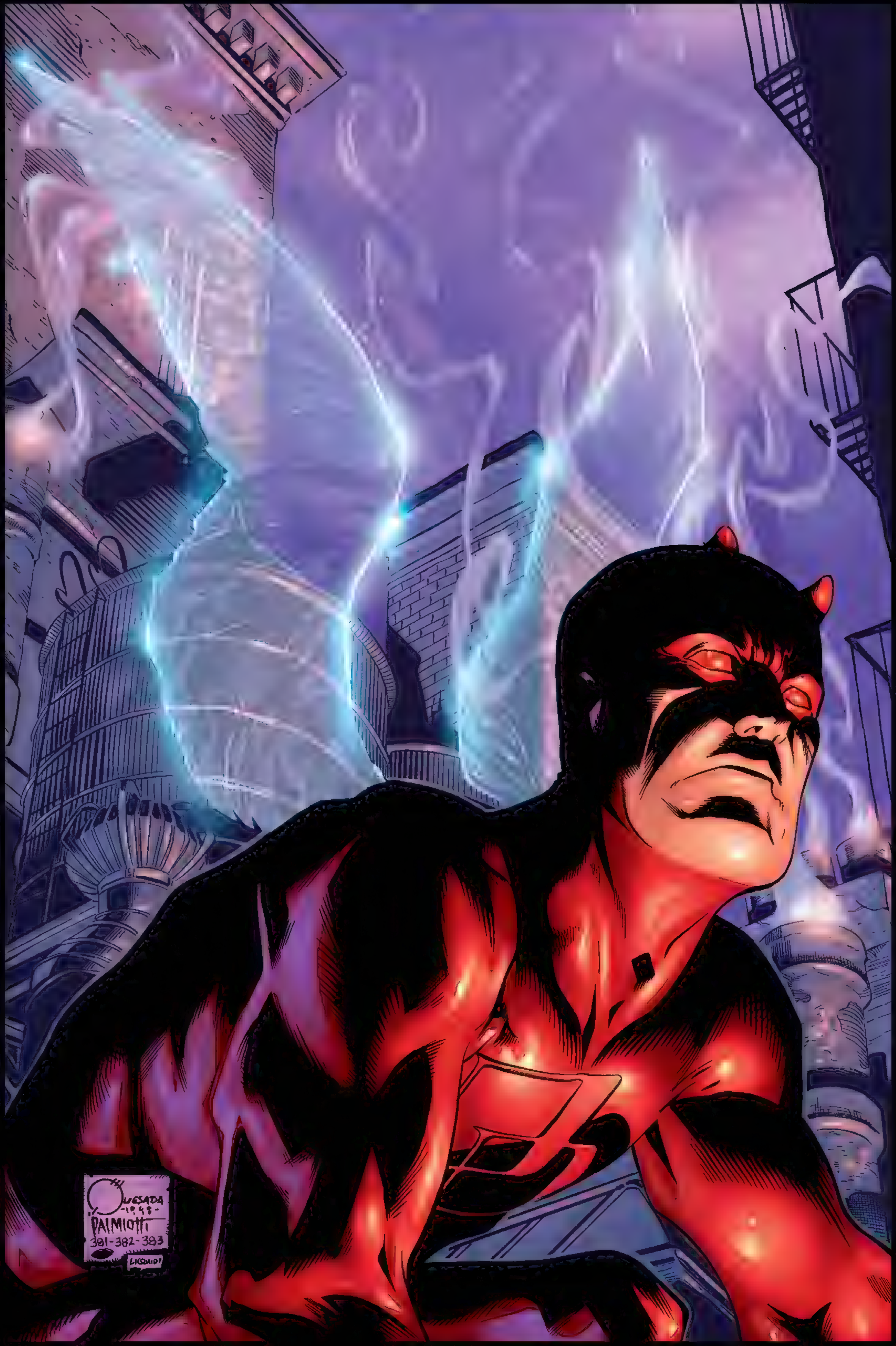
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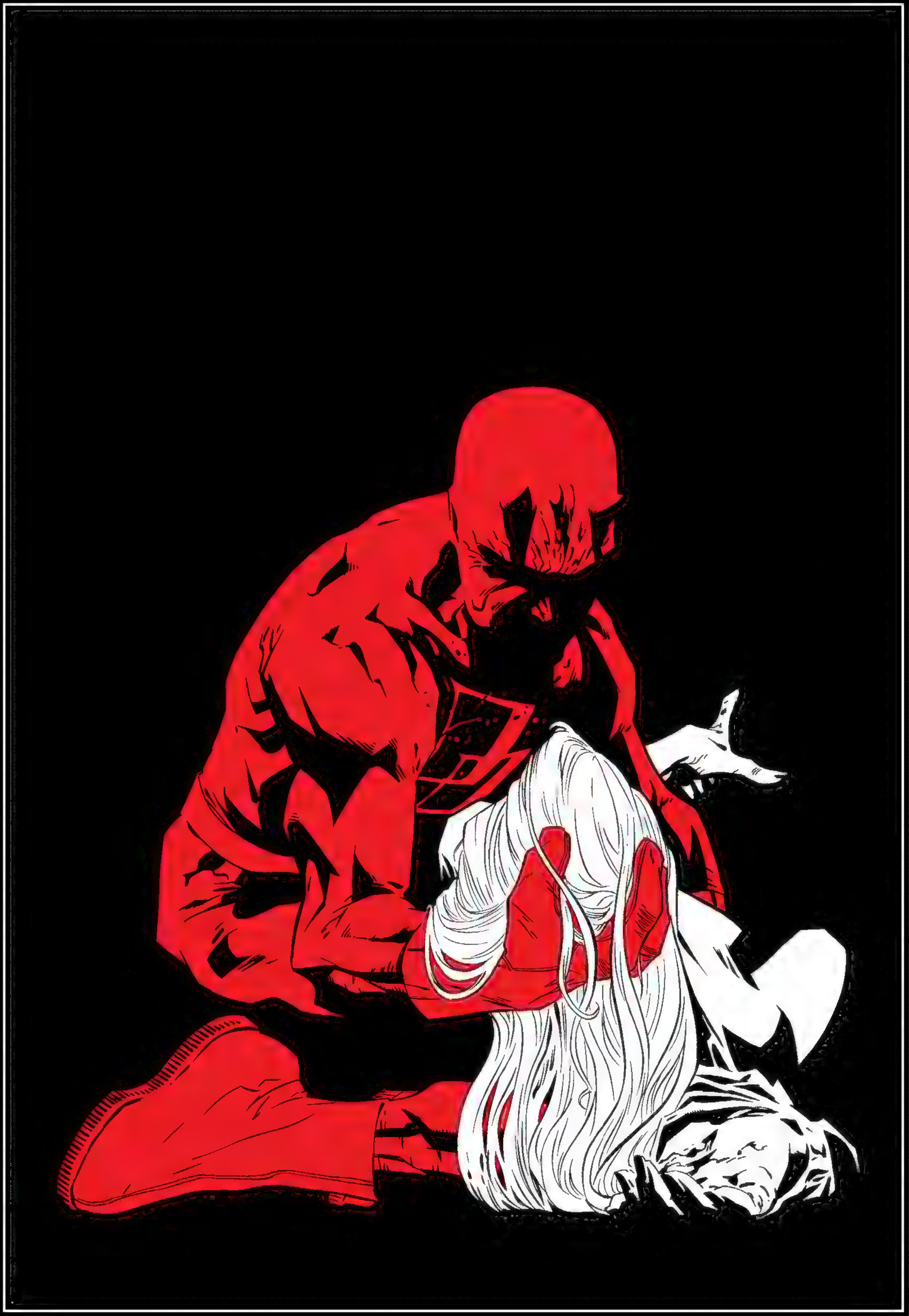

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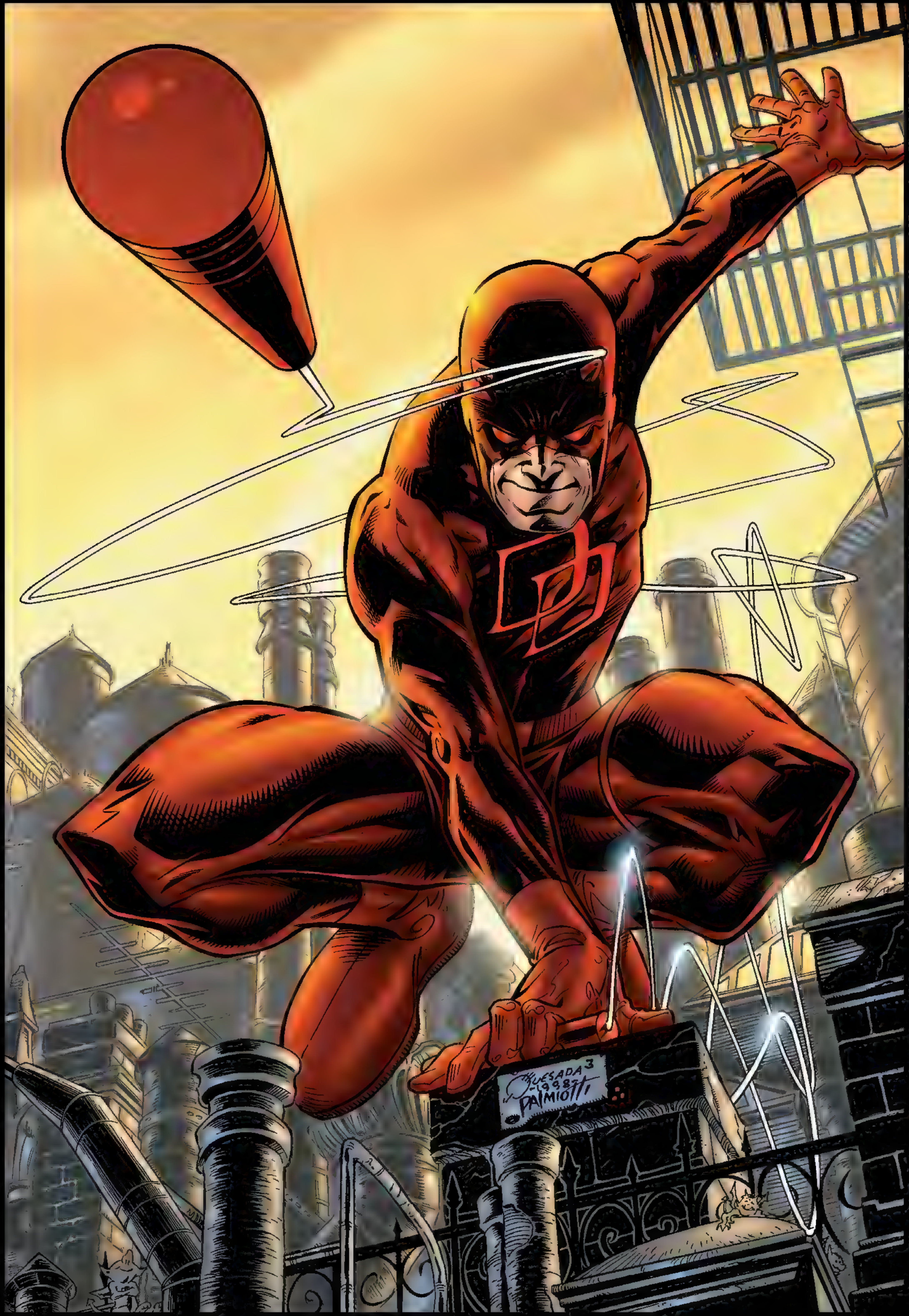
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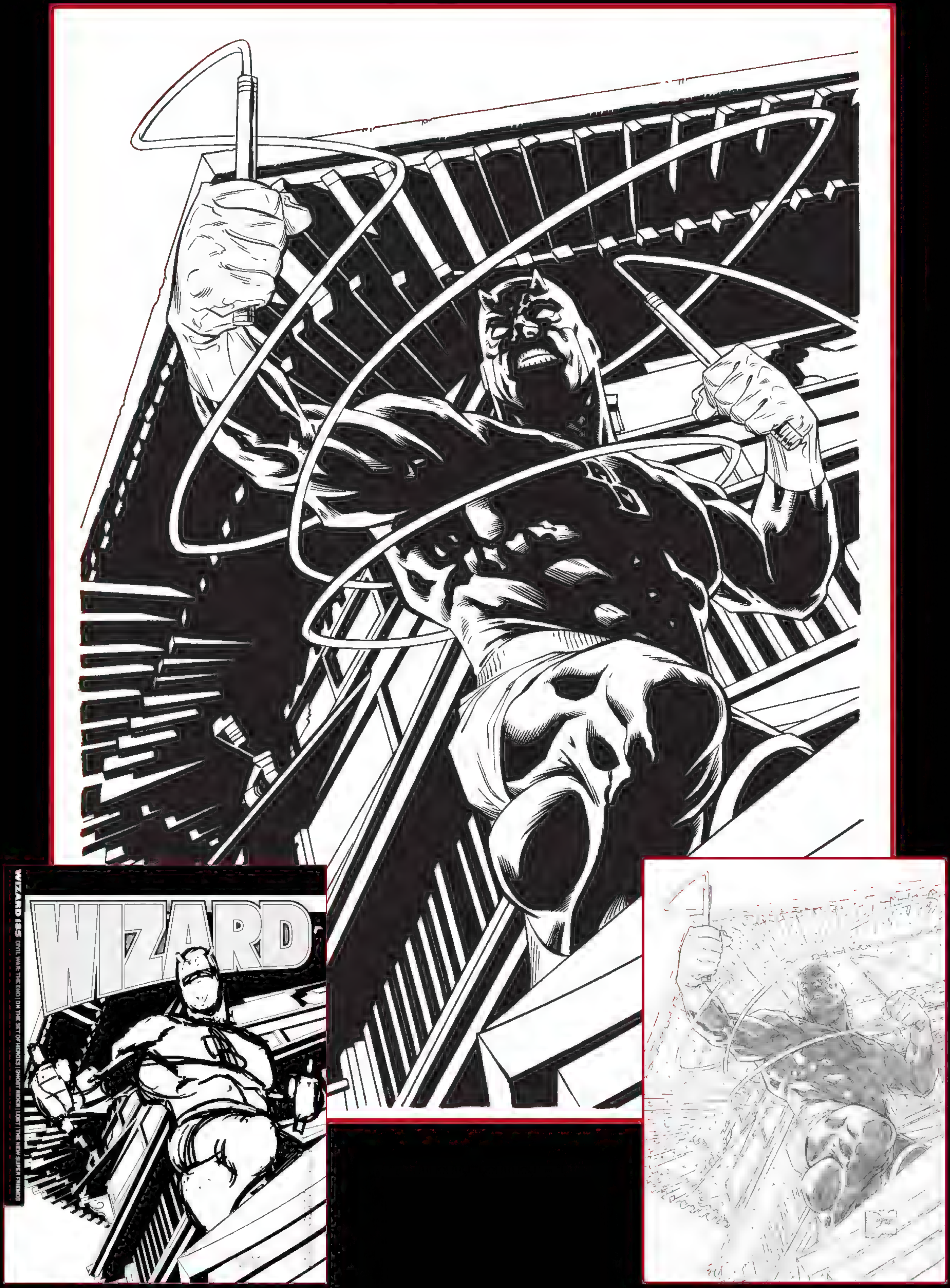
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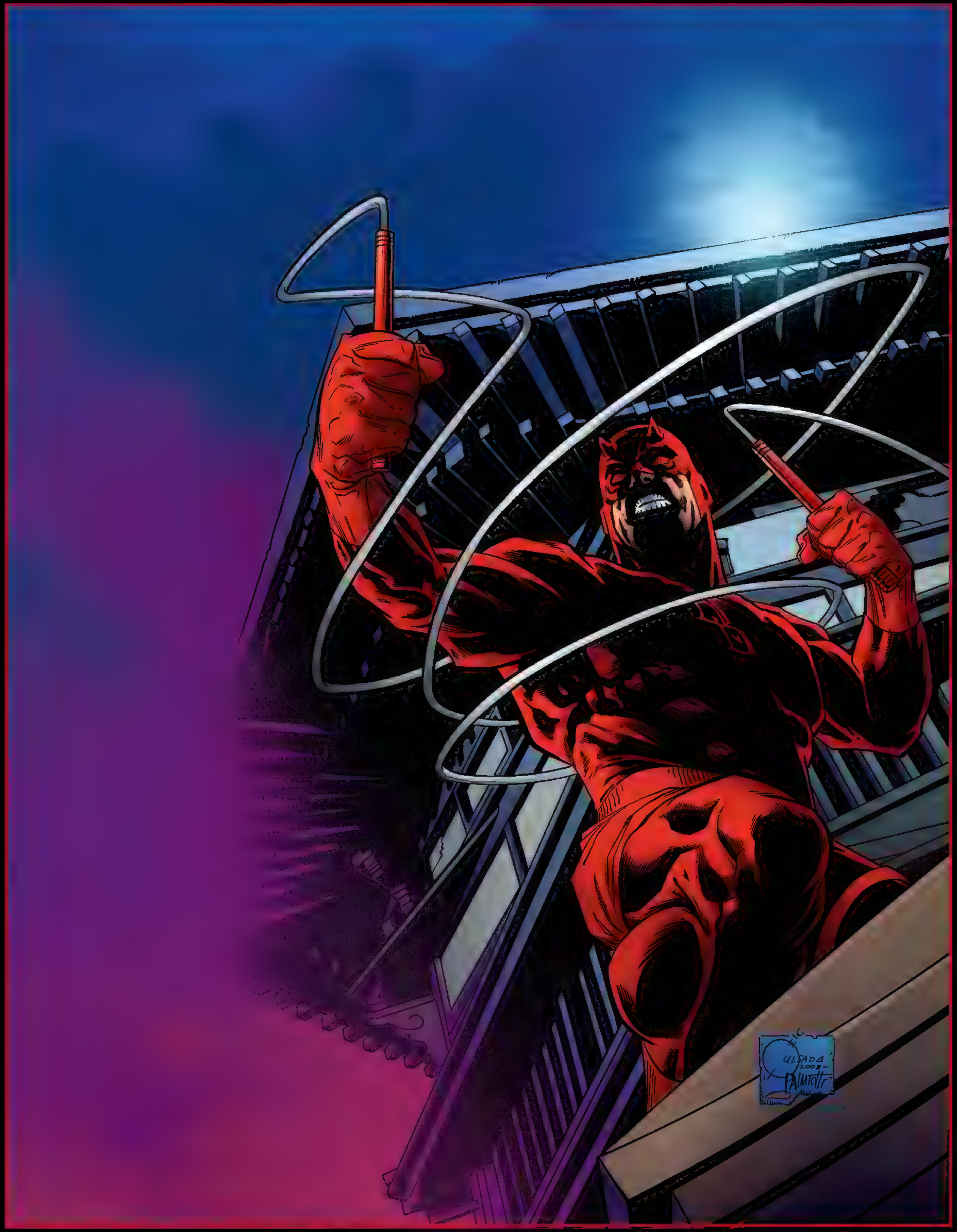
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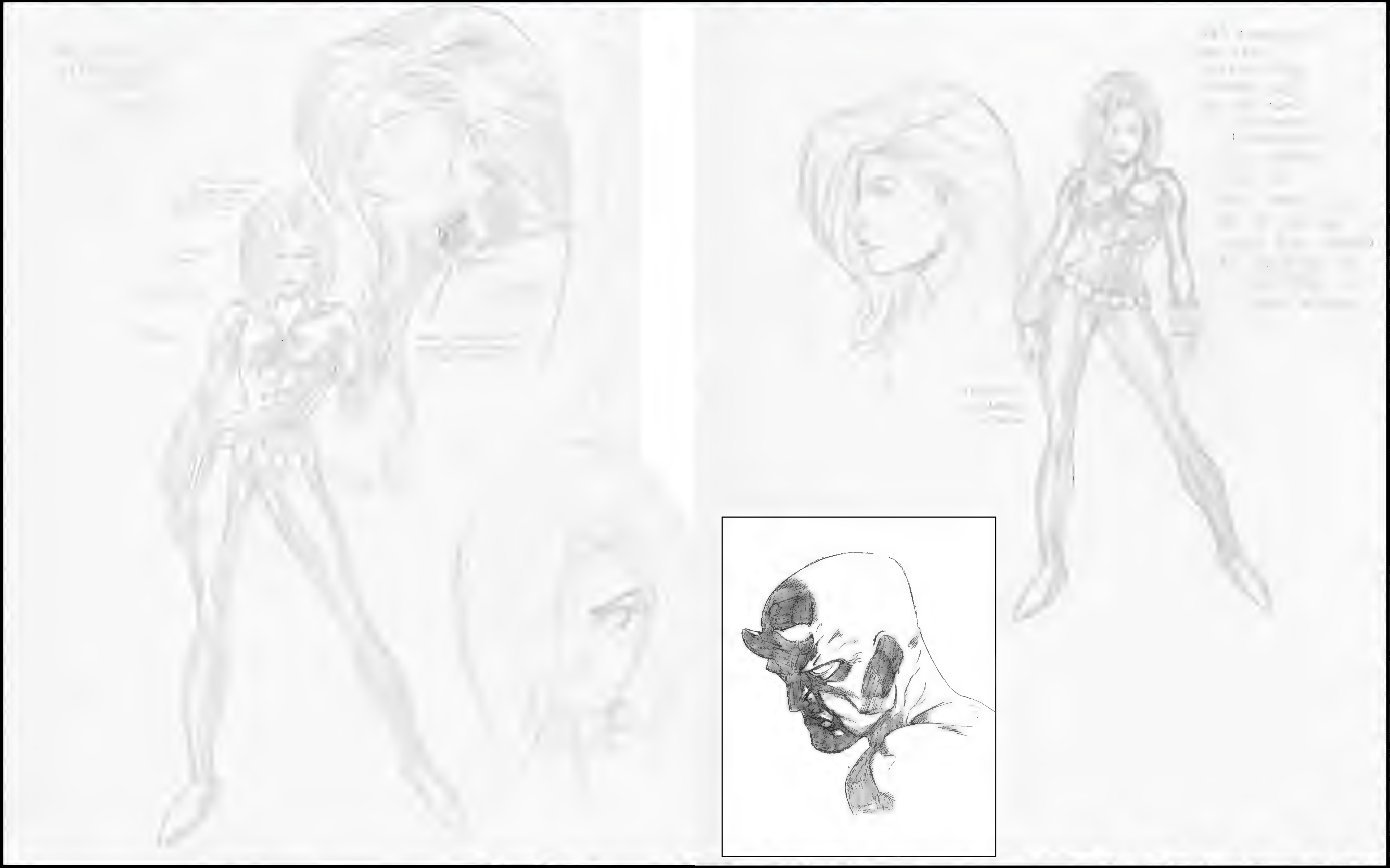
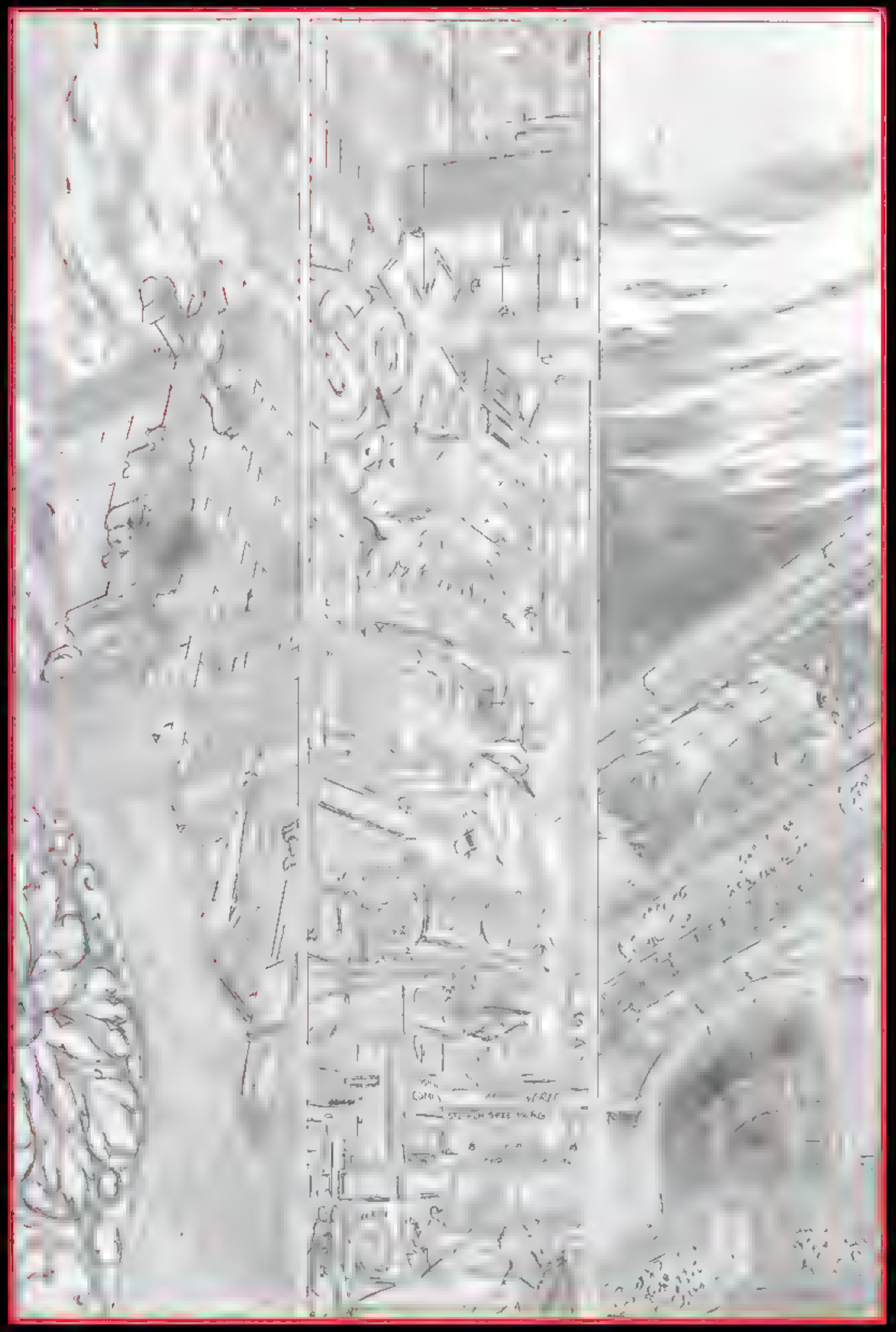
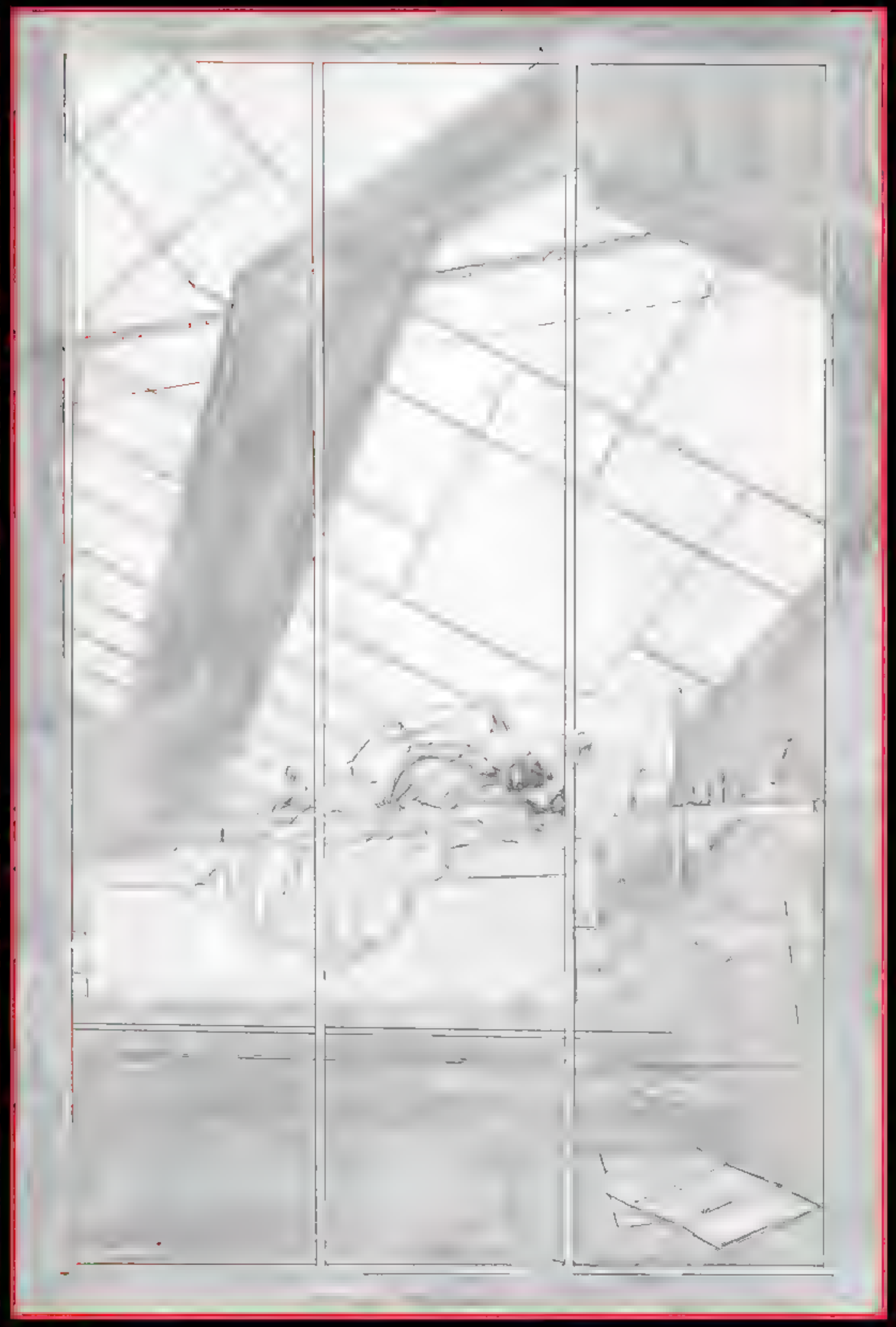
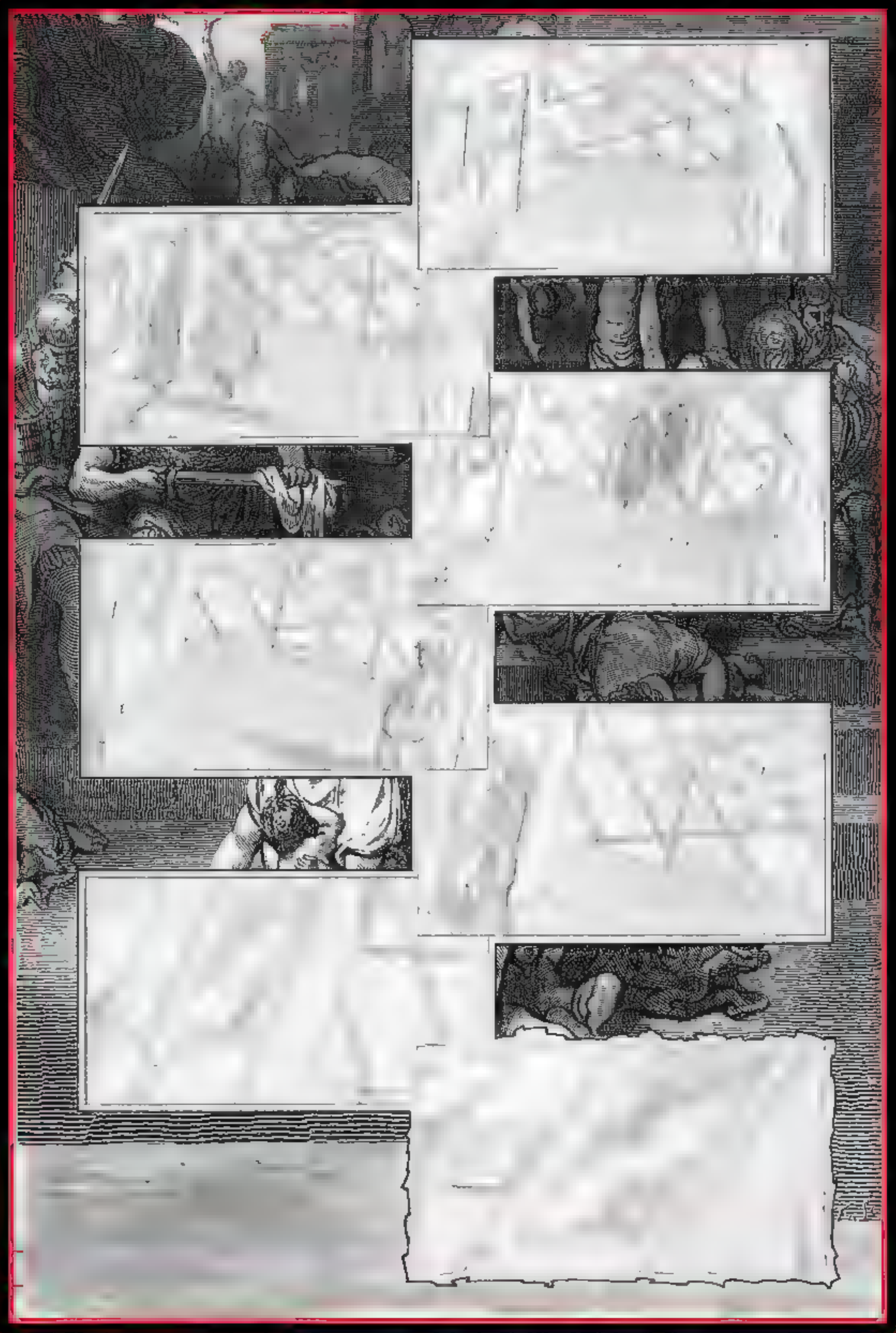
BLACK WIDOW & DAREDEVIL DESIGNS
by JOE QUESADA

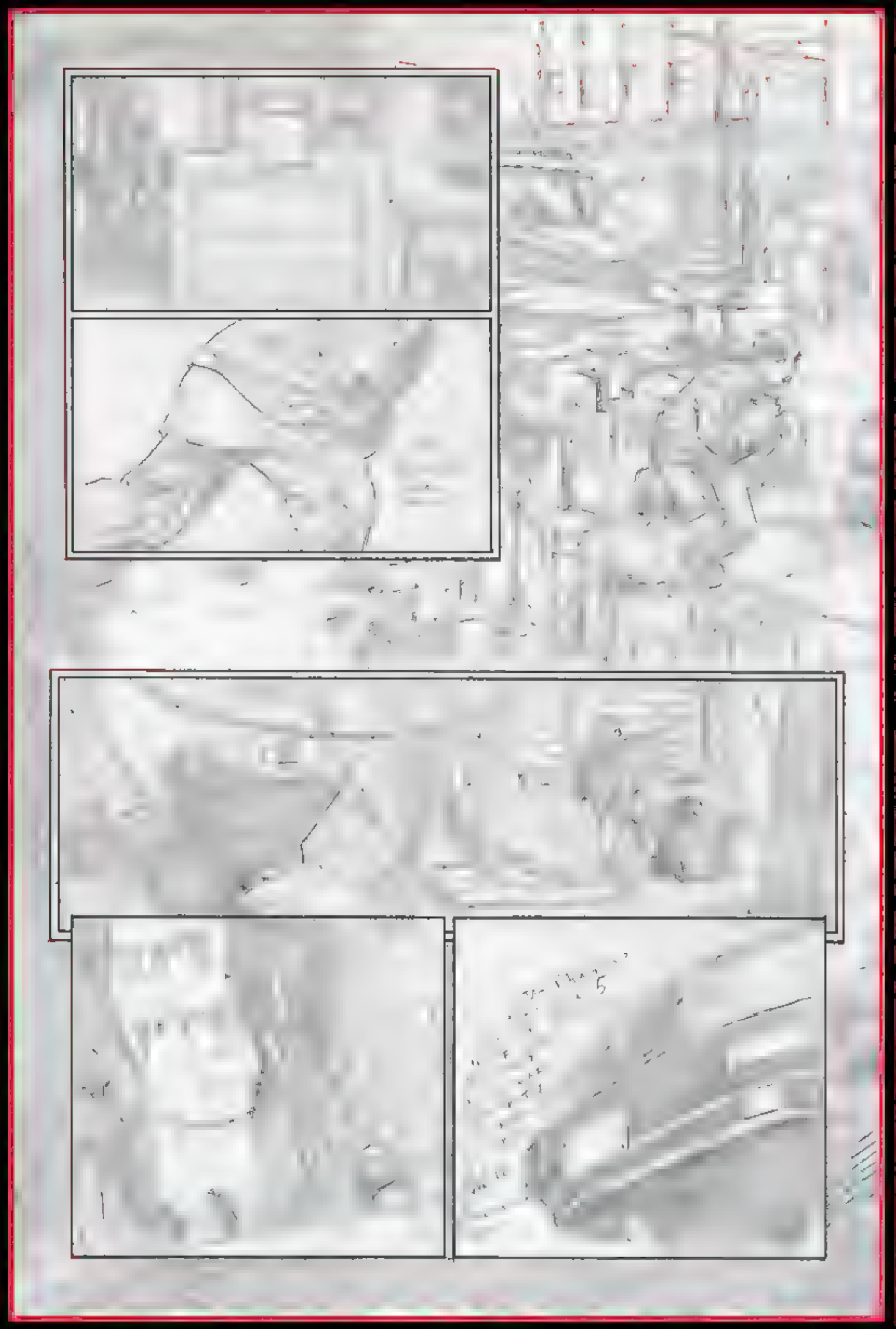


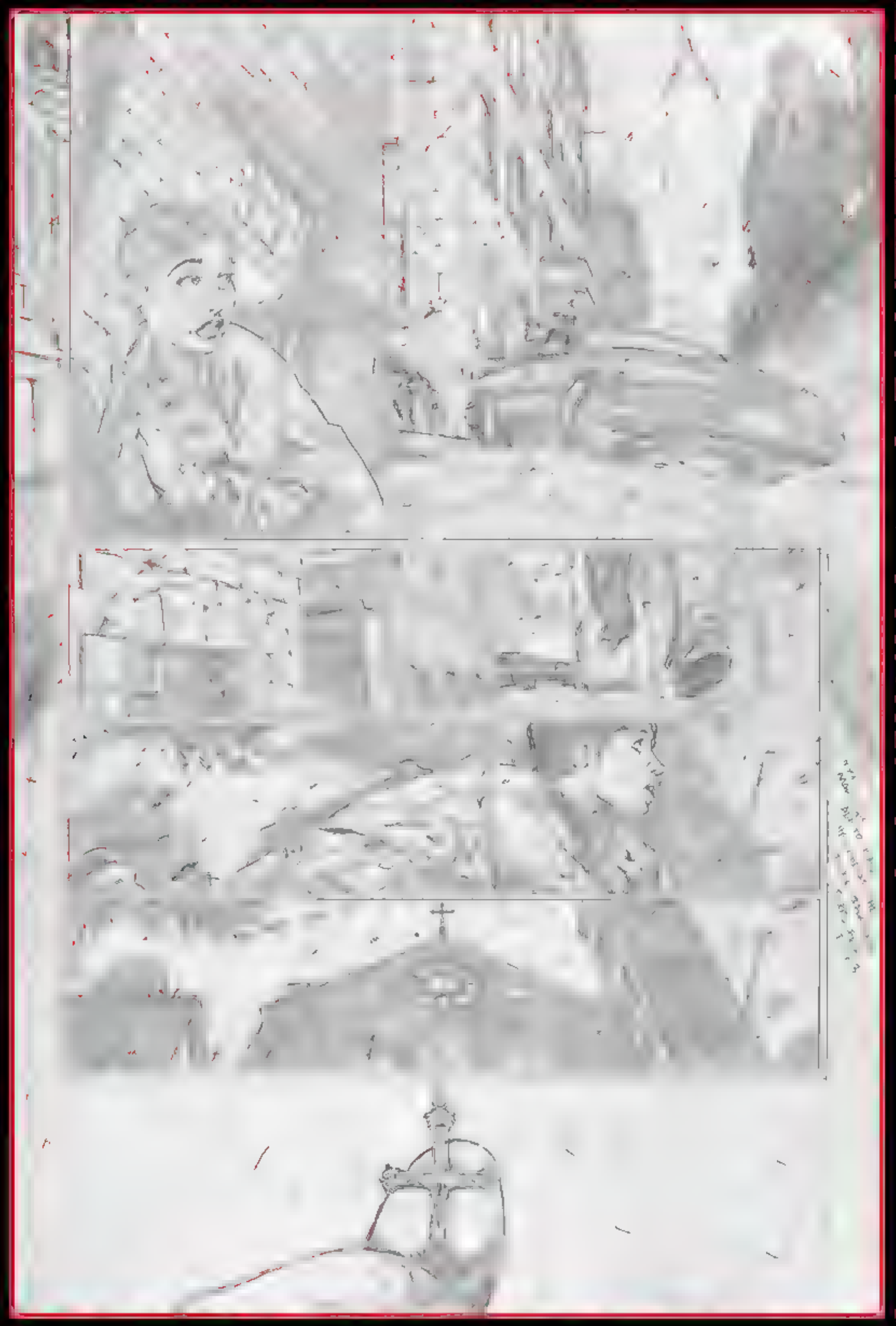
DAREDEVIL #1 PENCILS
by JOE QUESADA

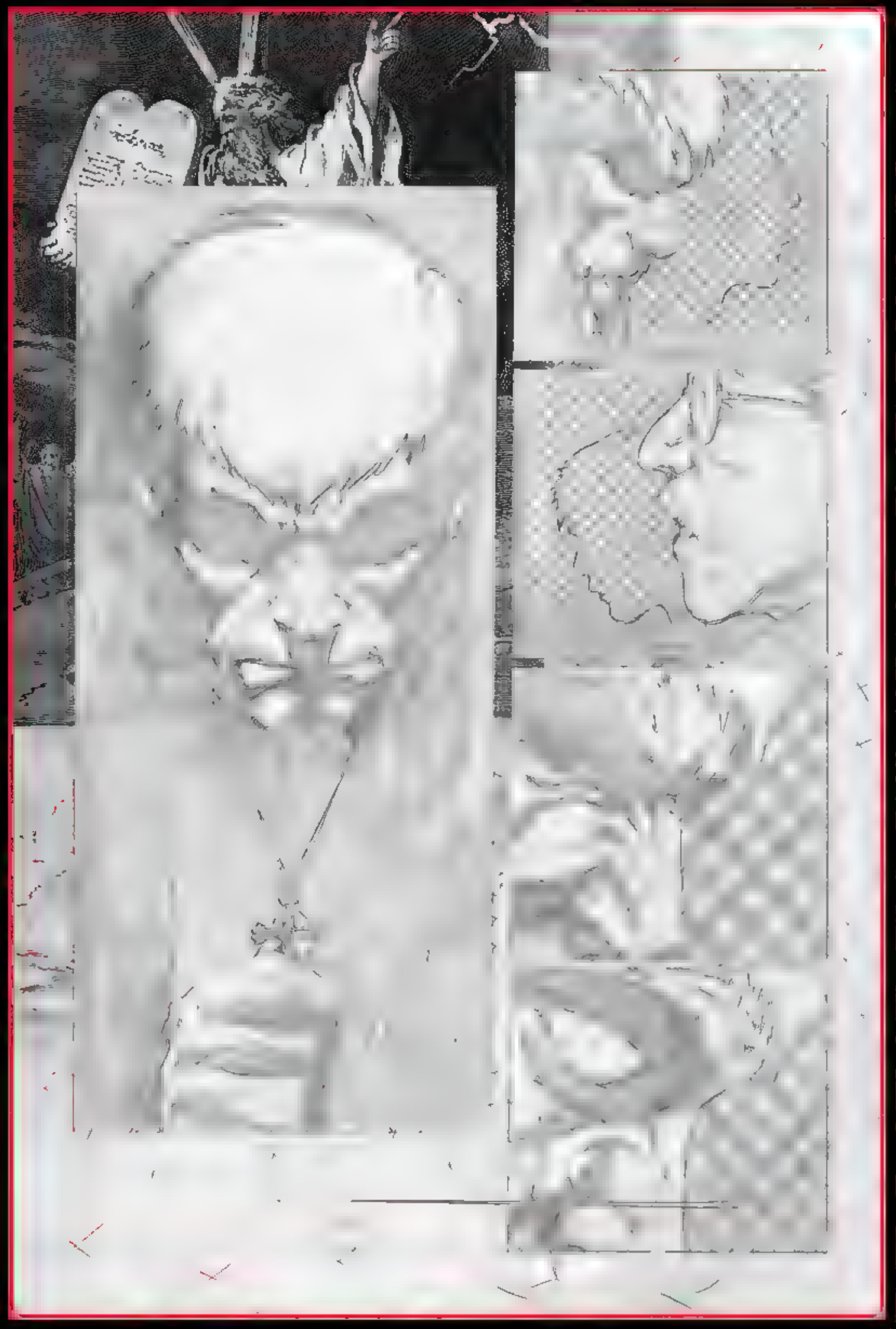


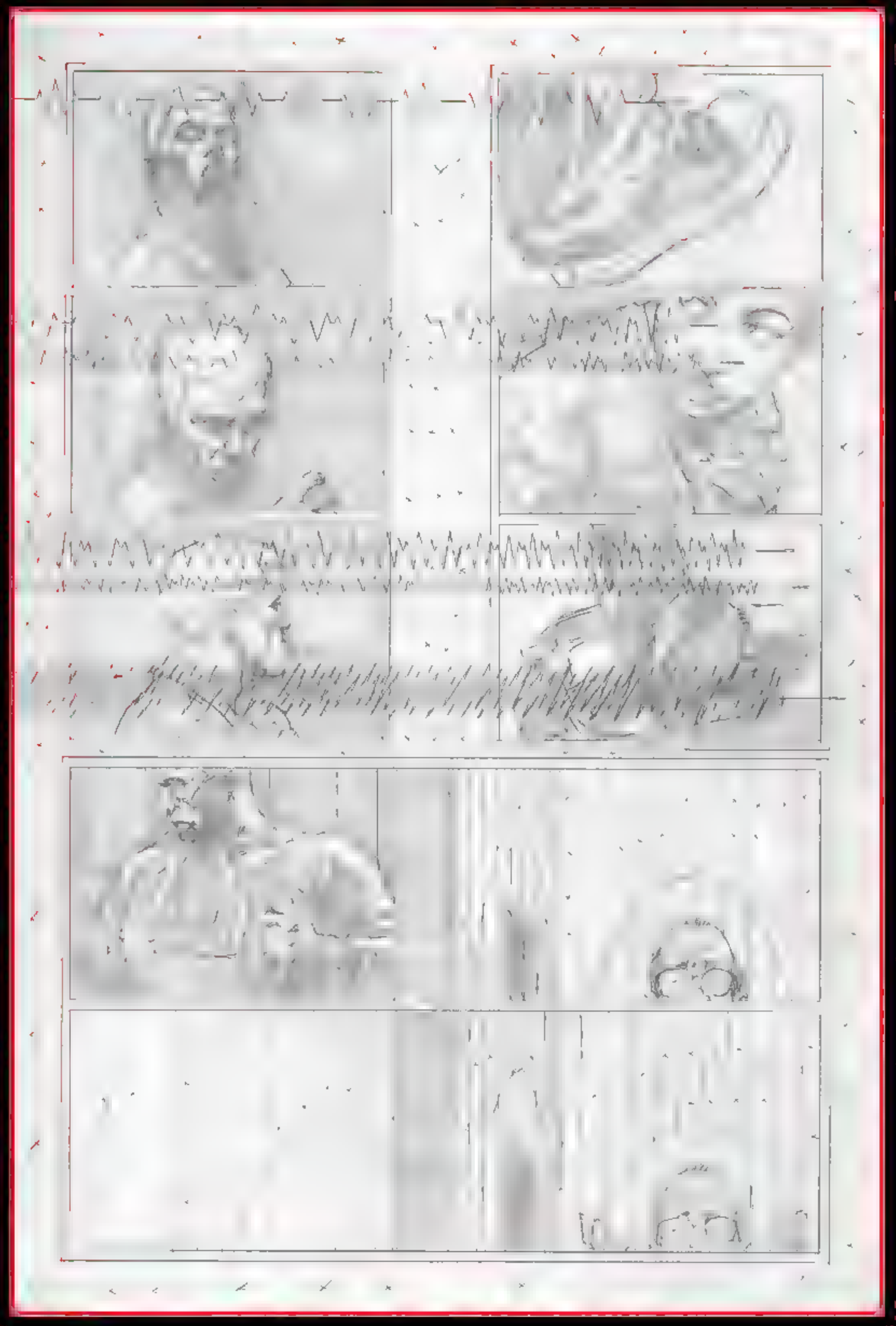


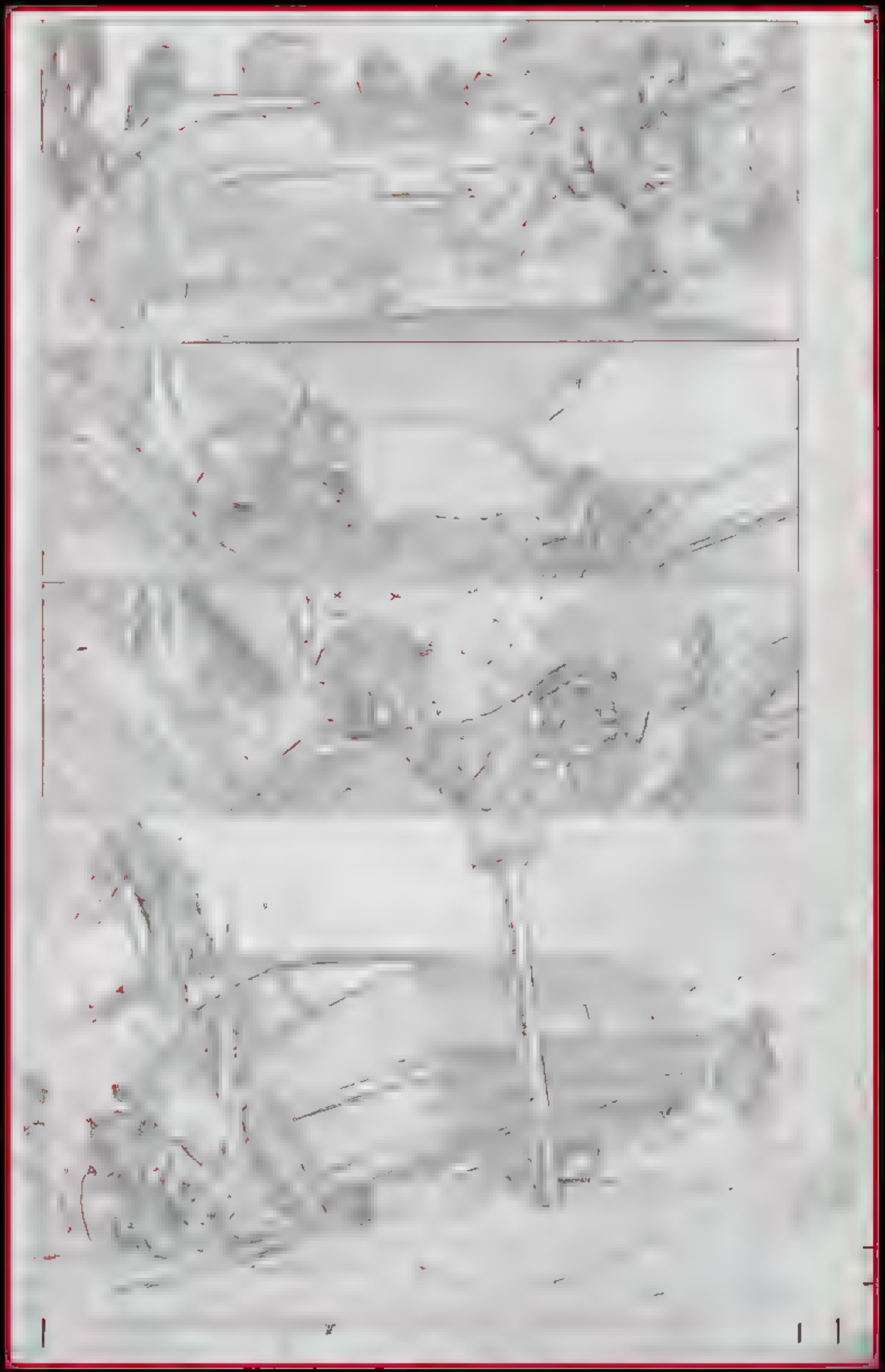


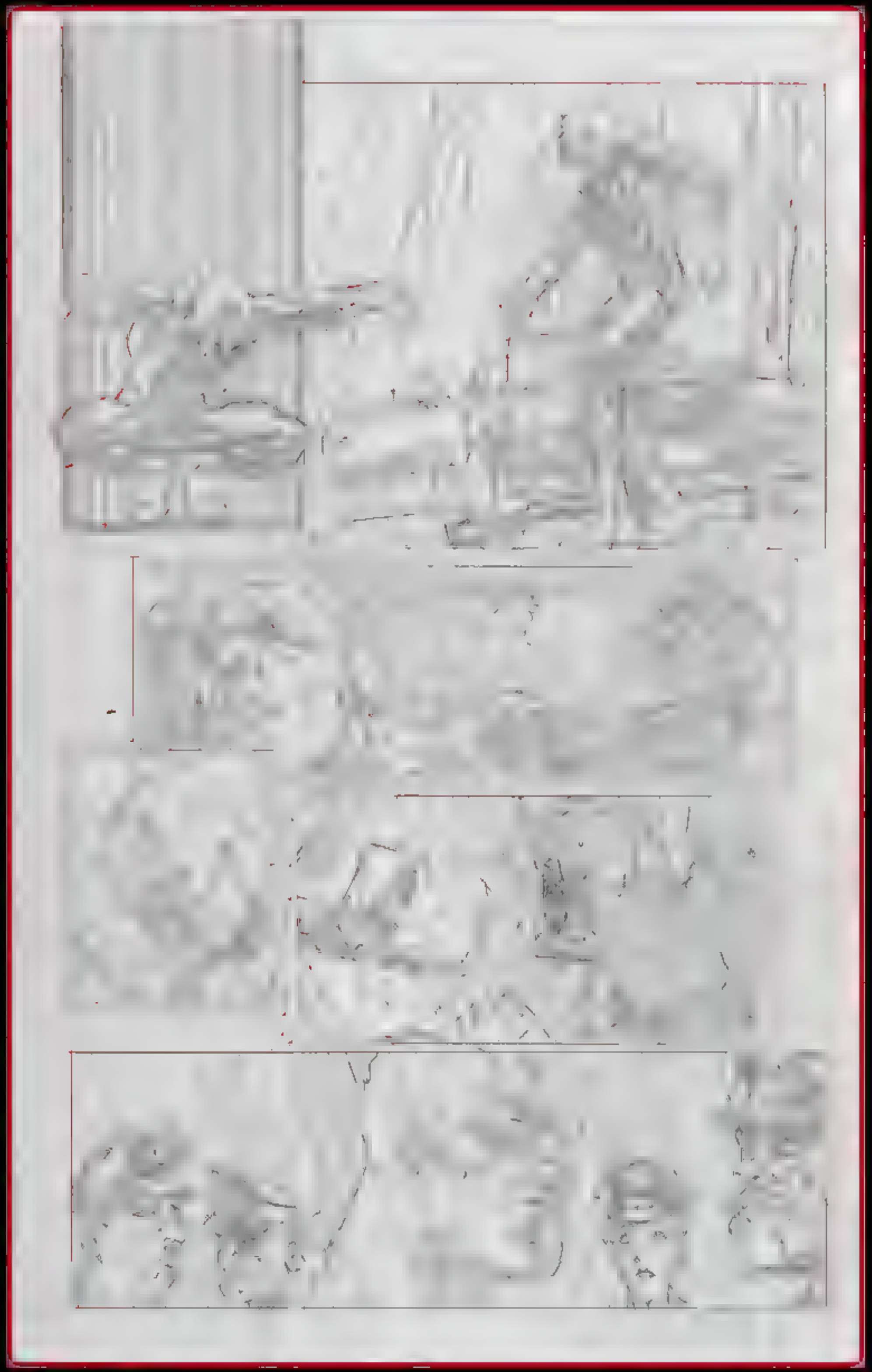


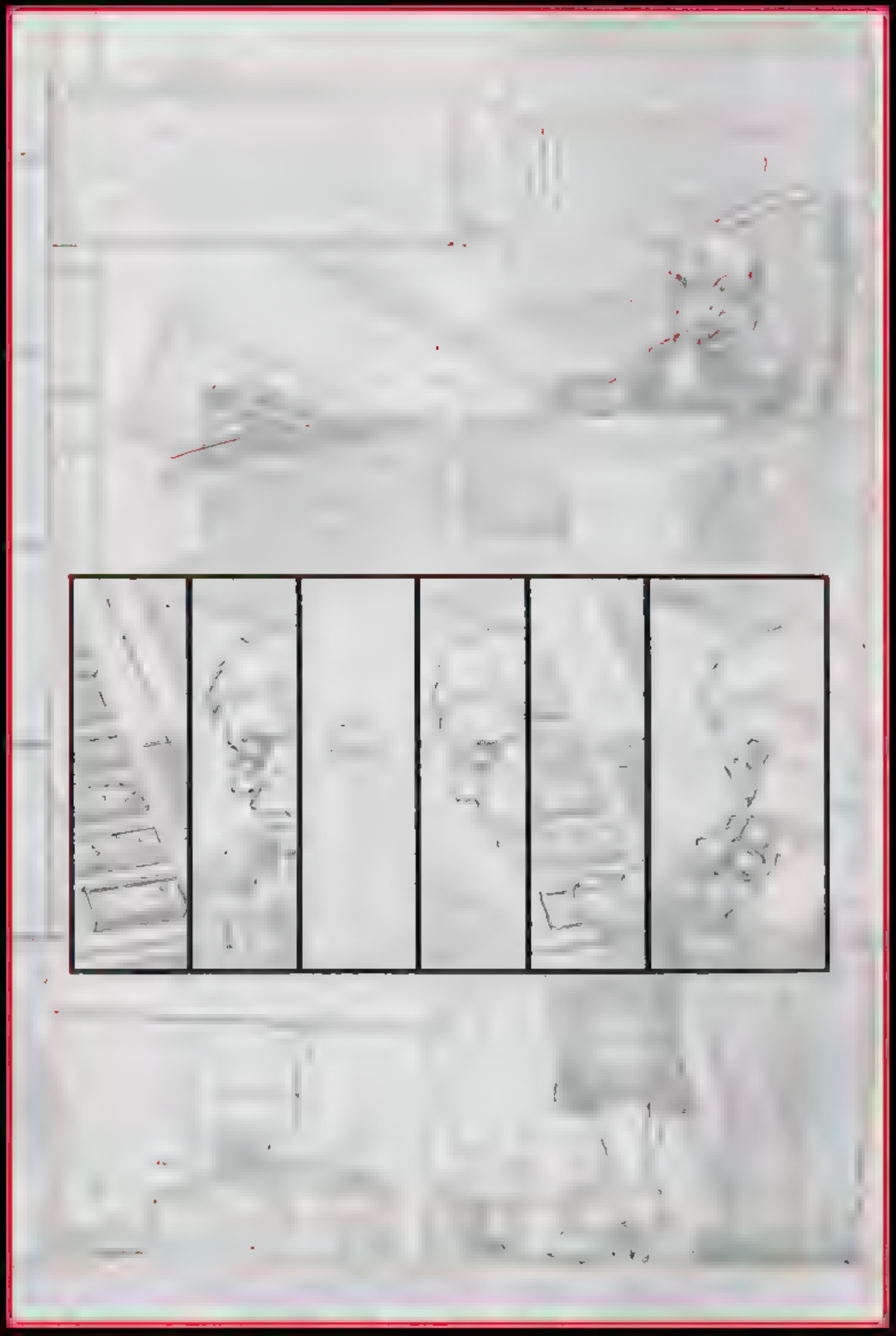


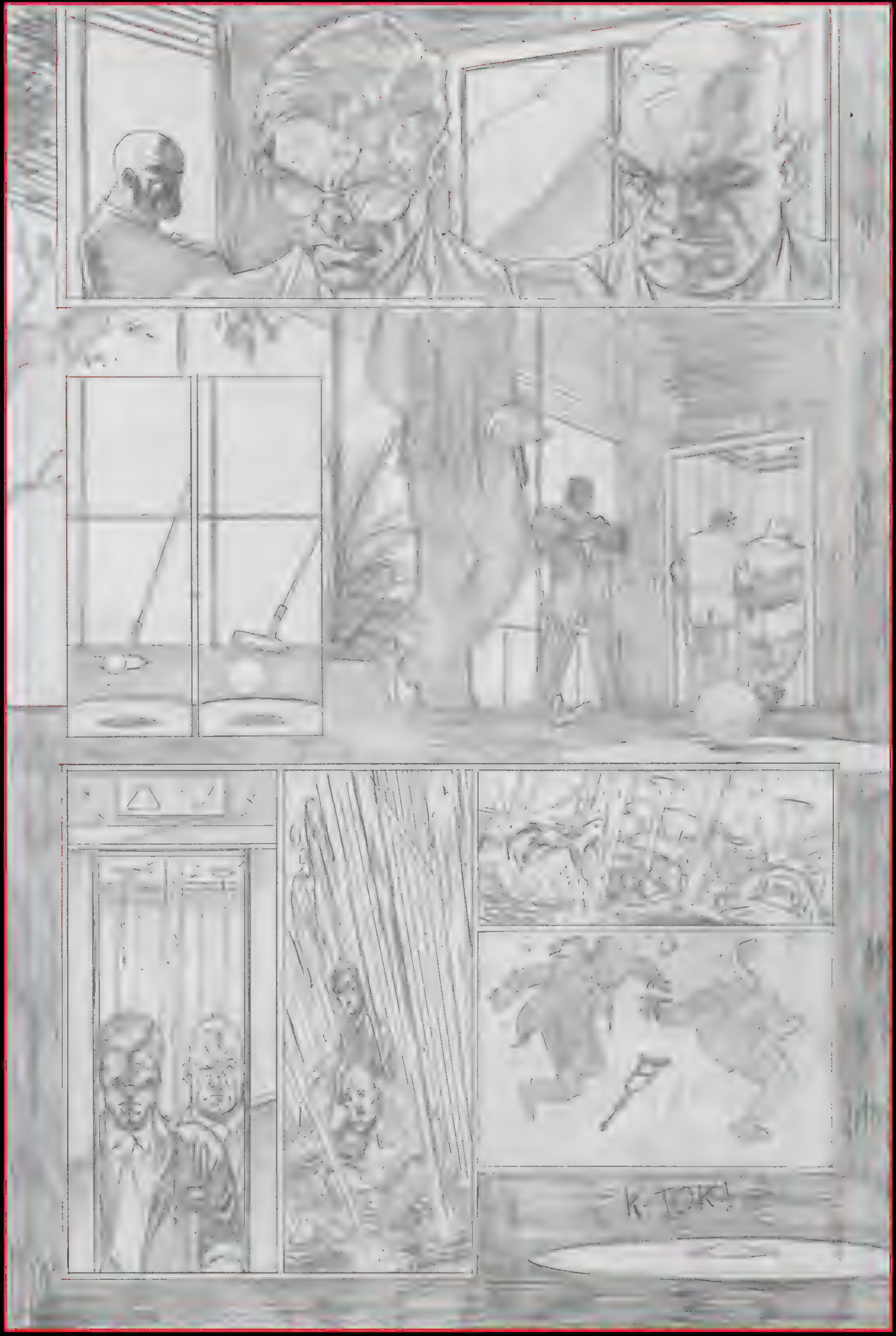








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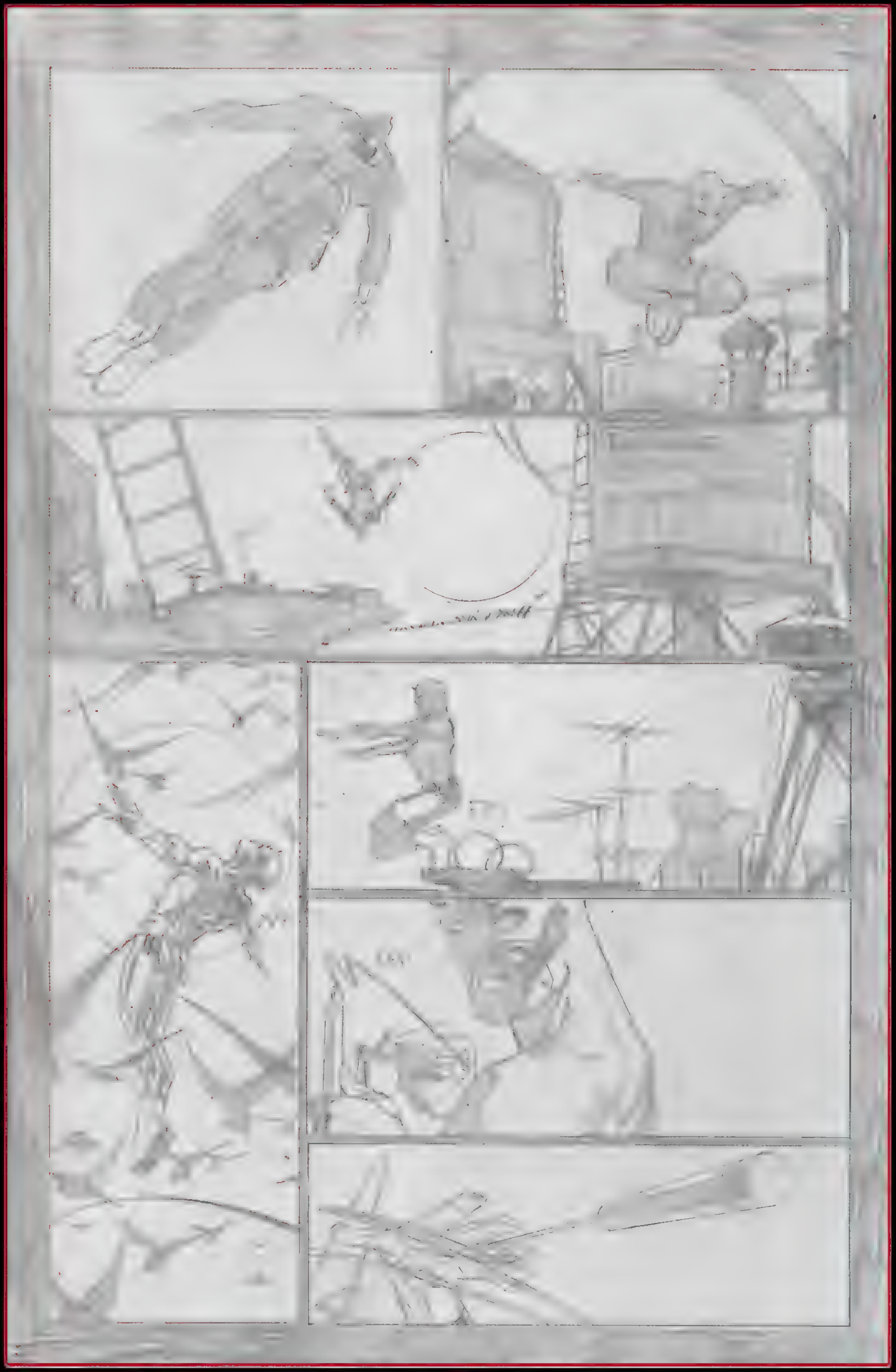

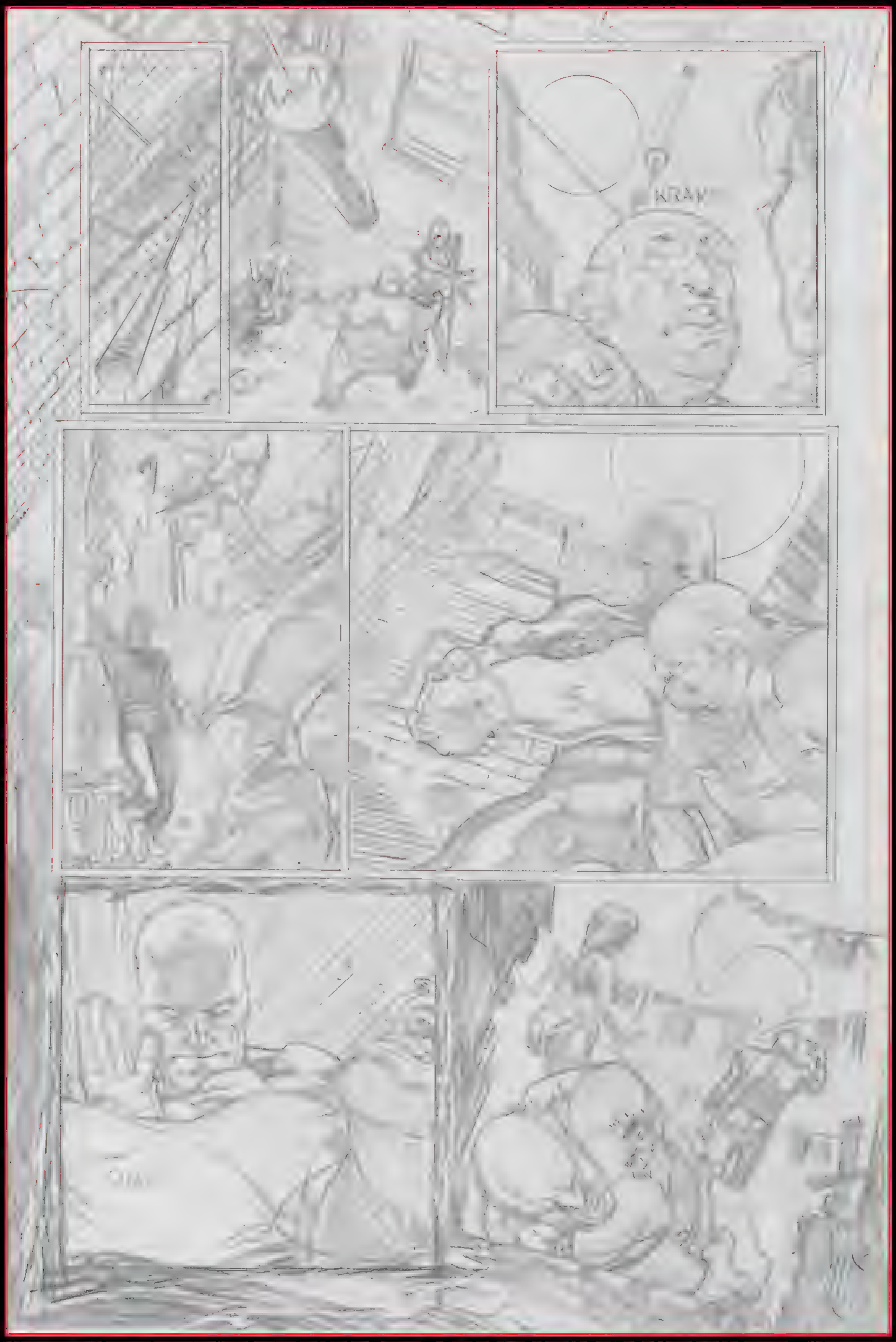
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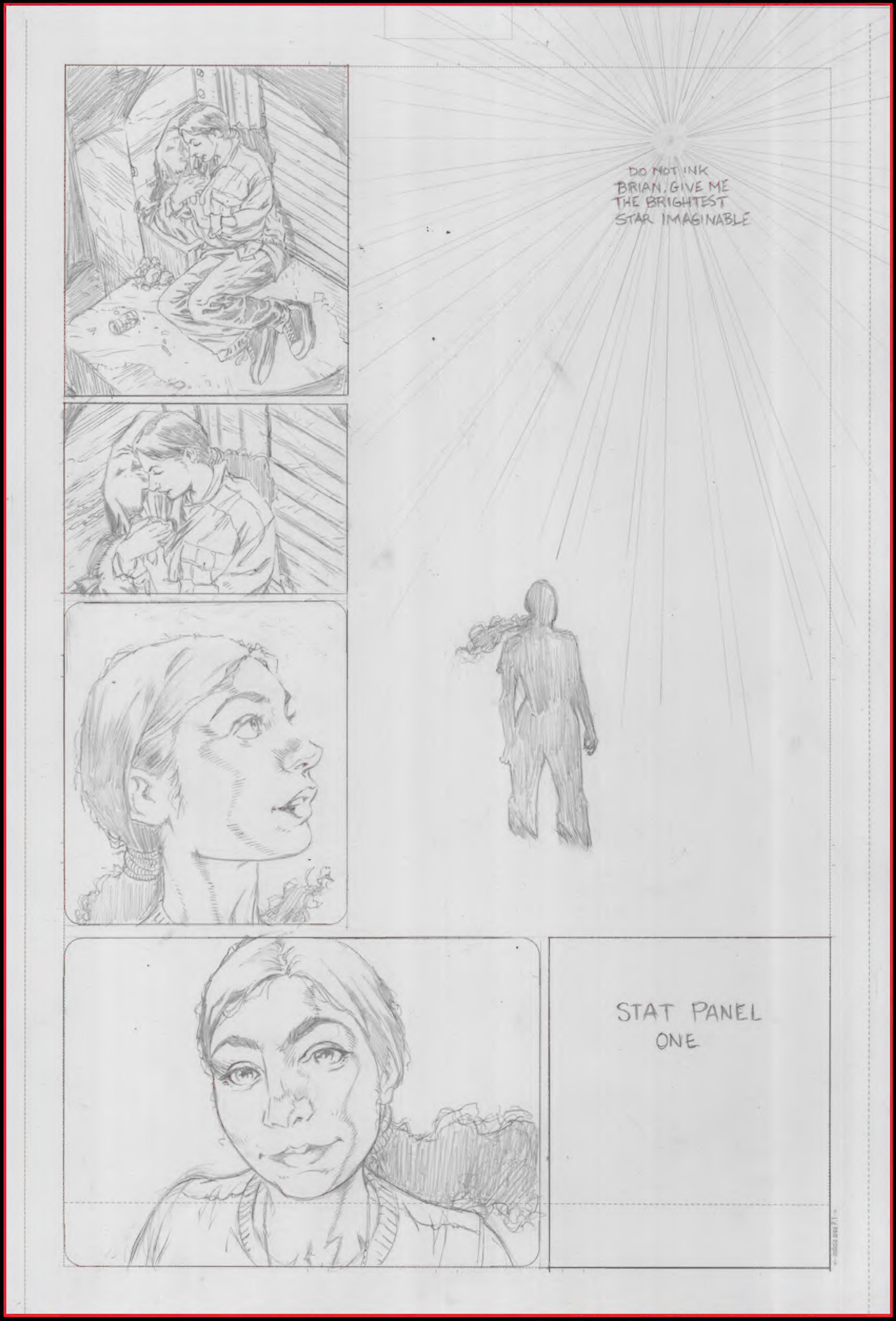
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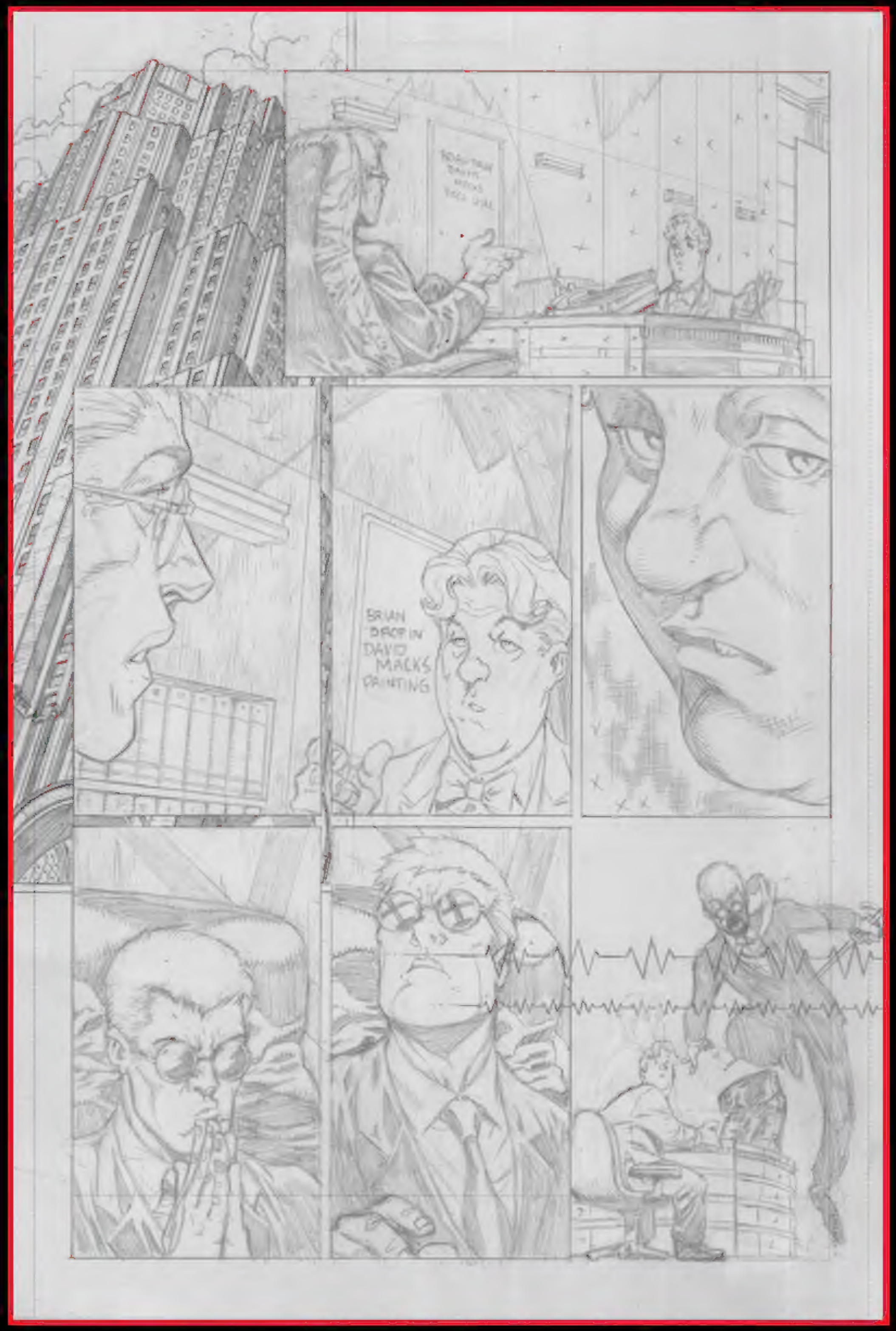
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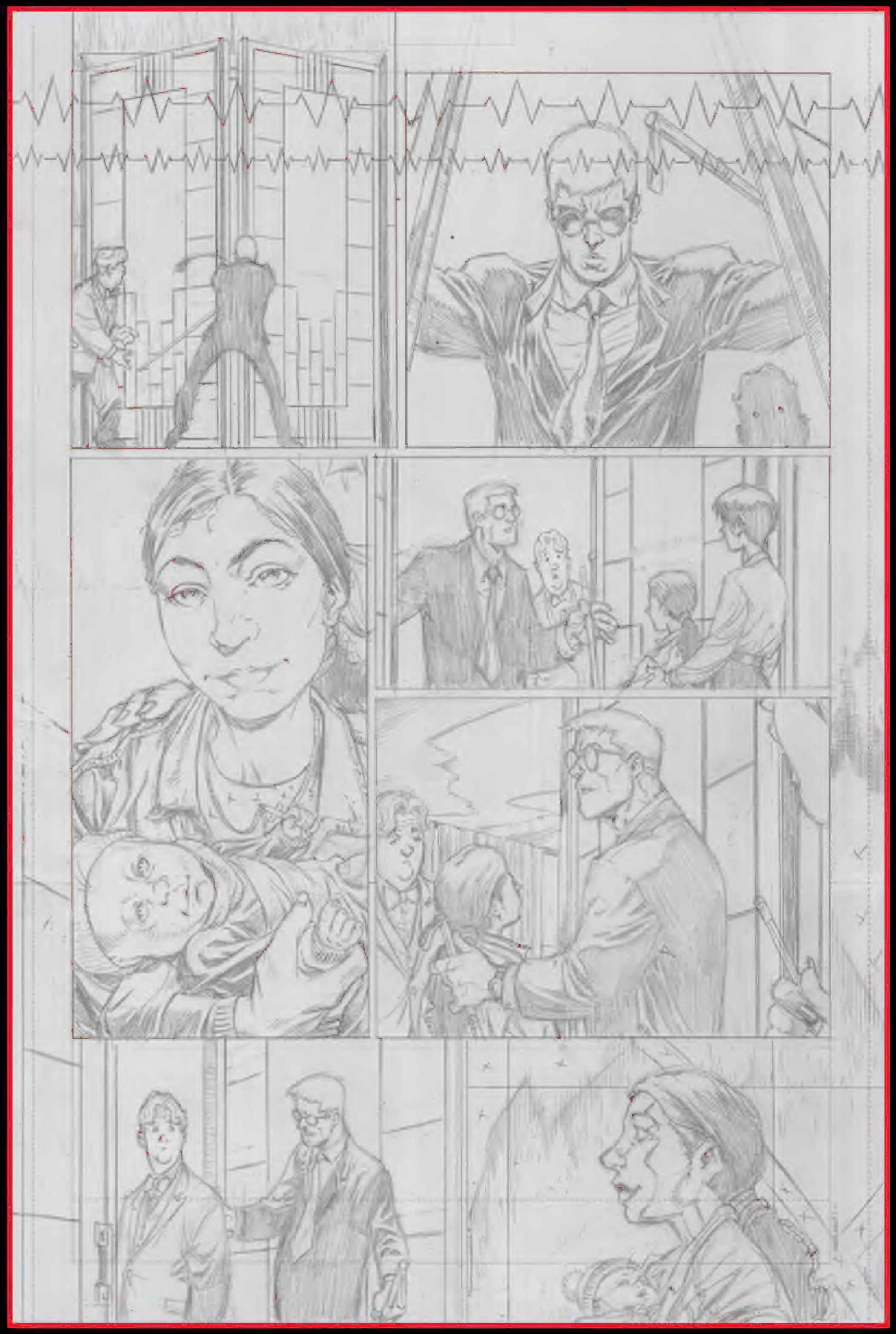

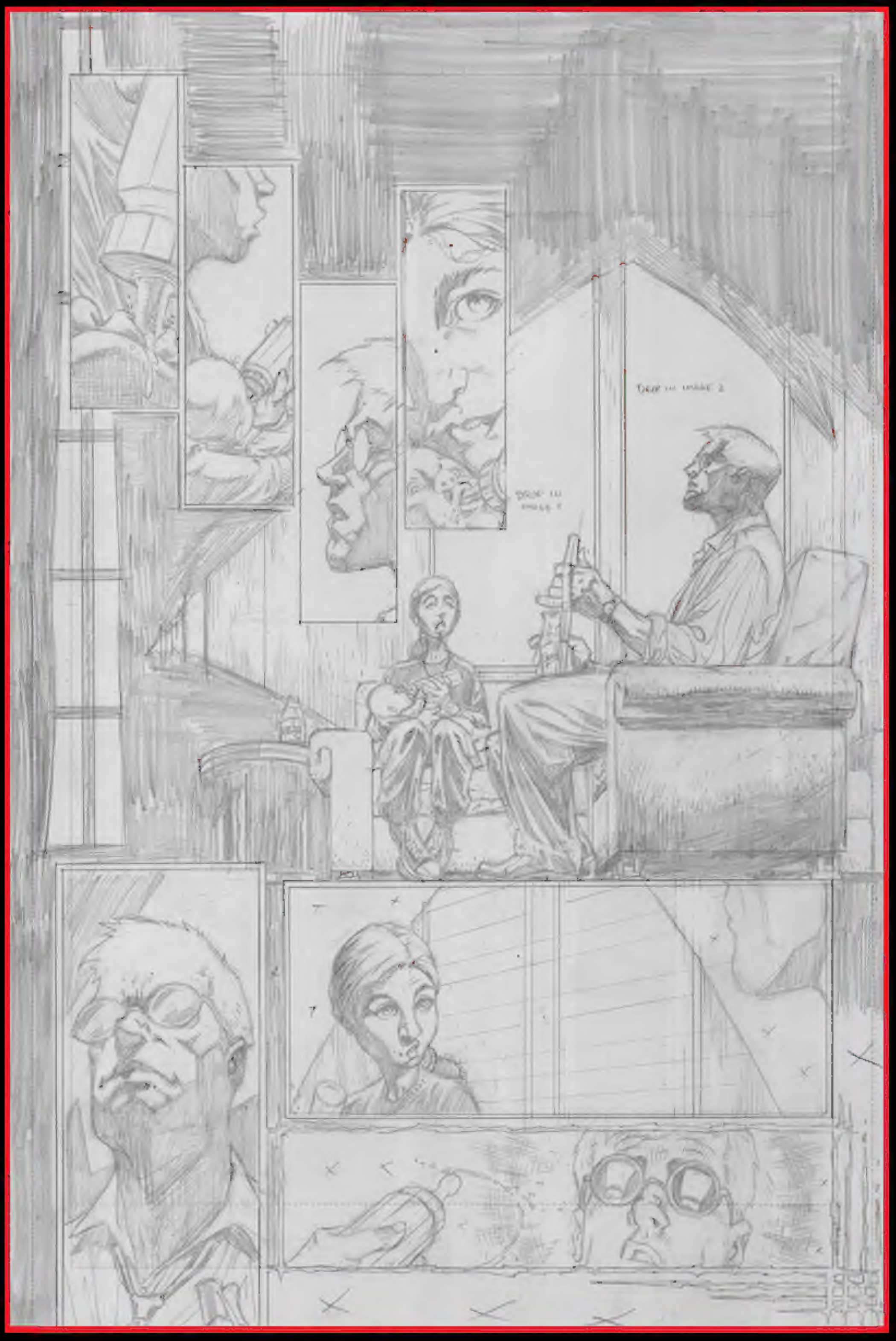

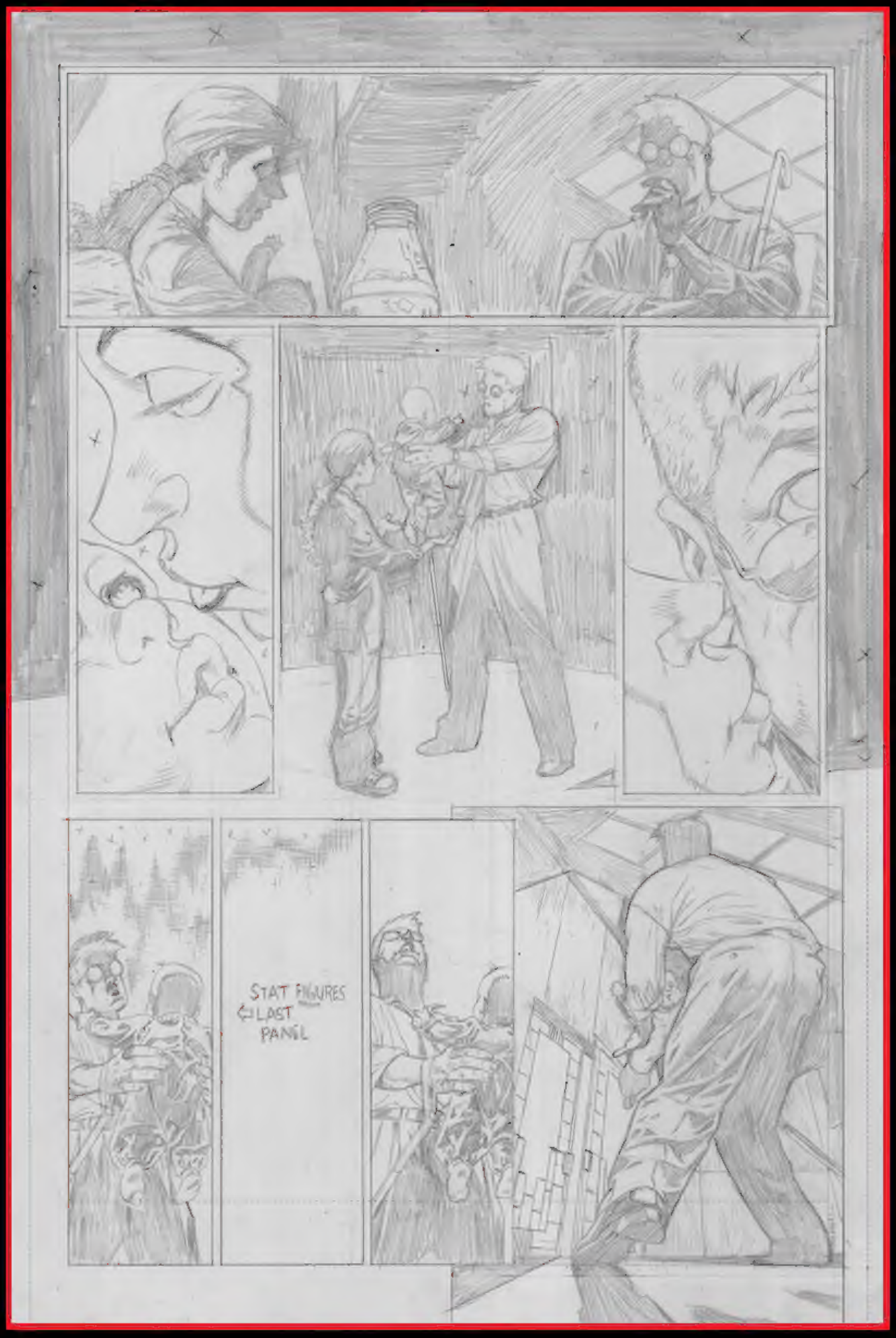
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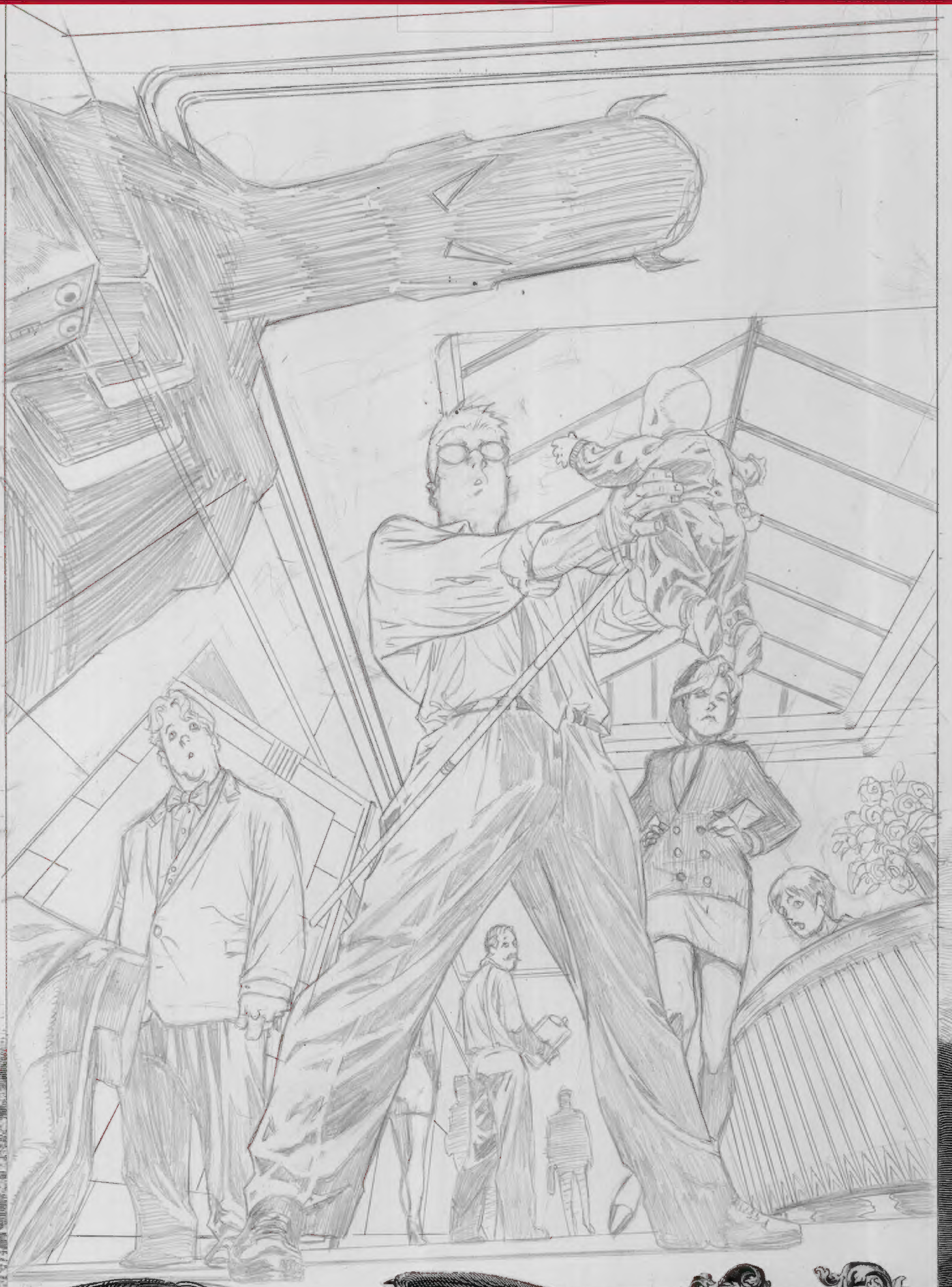

> "...A GRIPPING AND EVEN THOUGHTFUL YARN... TO PUT IT IN CRITICAL JARGON SMITH KNOWS WELL: THUMBS UP."
>
> — JEFF JENSEN, *ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY*

A scared teenager on the run. An infant child some say is humanity's savior. A former lover whose life is now hobbled by a terrible secret. A law partner accused of a horrible crime. A city being overcome by an inscrutable menace.

They need a guardian. Someone to protect them. Someone with faith in them. They need Daredevil.

Guardian Devil found Kevin Smith (***Clerks***, ***Chasing Amy***) confidently transitioning from writing acclaimed screenplays to comics that hit the top of the sales charts and critics' lists. It also found artist Joe Quesada at his peak as the stylist who would usher Marvel Comics into the 21st century — both as an artist and its future editor in chief. It's a landmark story now available in this special 10th anniversary edition that looks back to the inaugural offering of the Marvel Knights imprint.

QUESADA 1998
PALMIOTTI 385
DAN

Collecting *Daredevil* *#1-8* and *#1/2*.

T+

MARVEL

ZONE